

Behind the Buckskin Curtain: Aboriginal youth participation in  
spiritual ceremonies combined with drama activities

by

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B. Ed. The University of British Columbia, 2000

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
(Curriculum Studies)

The University of British Columbia

December, 2006

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## **Abstract**

Behind the Buckskin Curtain looks at how spiritual ceremonies and drama activities impact Aboriginal youth's healing experience? This thesis is about an Aboriginal youth study that was conducted from April 9 - May 14, 2003. The study included youth between the ages of 19 - 25 who were living in Vancouver, British Columbia. Participants committed to get together once a week for six weeks at the Native Education Centre in the inner-city of Vancouver BC. This study was proposed to inquire into the spiritual needs of Aboriginal Youth in British Columbia. Specifically this study inquires into the participants regained healing through their use of spiritual ceremonies and drama activities.

Chapters one to three discuss healing in the British Columbia Aboriginal community. Chapter four discusses the way in which the Aboriginal youth study unfolded. Chapter five and six look at the results and the conclusions, implications, and recommendations the study indicates.

Aboriginal youth share with us what they have learned prior to the study about their spiritual lives and about how they have learned through their experience with spiritual ceremonies combined with drama activities. The results show that Aboriginal youth did gain healing through their participation in spiritual ceremonies combined with drama activities

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## Acknowledgments

I am grateful to my children Nkwemus, Nesa7, and Tsitsiyatkwu for being my light and for guiding me forth in life. I give thanks for my grandsons Tylor and William who were both born during this study. I give thanks for my Mother Hope Elizabeth who has always believed in me. I give thanks for my grandmothers who have passed on for teaching me how to be a strong woman.

I give thanks for Dr. Rita Irwin, Dr. Lynn Fels, and Dr. Rod McCormick for choosing to walk with me into the light. Special thanks go to Dr. Rita Irwin for her courage and guidance that supported this study to its completion. Special commendation goes out to all for being willing to engage on this important topic.

Deep gratitude goes out to the Aboriginal youth who made this idea become a reality and in this way shared their light with us. Their commitment to the study and to each other is inspirational to me.

Special gratitude goes out to my spiritual brothers and sisters for sharing their light at the sacred places where they have taught me how to sing and of how to engage with the universe (s) outside myself and within myself. I give thanks to the Lakota Nation for allowing me to sing their songs.

I am grateful for support from Dr. Rita Irwin and Dr. Anthony Clarke by advocating on my behalf to keep this important study from falling into a black hole. I am also grateful to Roger James and Gladys Grenier from the Lytton First Nation Education Department who had shown their belief in me through their encouragement and support over the years.

## **Dedication**

For Aboriginal youth and for all youth who will or who have thought of suicide as an answer to their suffering and pain.

For those youth who participated in this study.

In memory of my grandmothers, grandfathers, brothers, and cousins who have committed suicide or who were murdered.

For my grandsons Tylor and William.

For my children Nkwemus, Nesa7, and Tsitsiyatkwu without whom I would not have been able to walk toward the light.

For my mother Hope Elizabeth Johns who gives meaning to my world.

For all who helped this study to its completion.

In memory of my theatre mentor, Dr. Peter Loeffler, who believed in me.

For my friend and colleague Annie Smith who has sheltered me from the rain and who made sure I had enough to eat to keep me going.

All My Relations



## **CHAPTER 1: Path of Healing Introduction**

My sole aim in life is to be a beacon of light. This notion is what propels me to write this thesis. I have come to know myself in profound ways as a result of this study through my willingness to reflect on my own story. I write my thesis not to create more shame but to express my grief and to offer guidance for our future.

In British Columbia (BC) we have many social problems that divide people from themselves and from each other. In BC schools we are told we must listen but we are not taught how to listen. We are expected to be seen but not heard. We are expected to know how to do these things without being given healthy examples and without being given activities that would help us build our listening skills. As a result there is much suffering and pain from abuses that need to be articulated both individually and collectively.

Why talk about Aboriginal education and who will listen? For generations Aboriginal leaders have called for the inclusion of Aboriginal spirituality in their children's curricula - a necessary part of their education because our relationships with the earth and the sky do not end (Miller, 1996). Aboriginal people value spiritual development because it teaches us about what it means to be a human being in relation to the universes both inside and outside of ourselves. Important elements of our spiritual development are: emotional, intellectual, physical, and spiritual. When we engage in spiritual developmental activities we learn about our relationships with people, places, and things. We learn how to be responsible for our actions, words, and deeds through: introspection, reflection, resolve, visioning, endurance, transformation, speech/song, and creativity. Through this process human beings are gifted with lessons that teach us

about the importance of reverence, relationships, respect, and reciprocity.

This thesis is about an Aboriginal youth study that was conducted from April 9 - May 14, 2003. The study included youth between the ages of 19 - 25 who were living in Vancouver, British Columbia. Participants committed to get together once a week for six weeks at the Native Education Centre in the inner-city of Vancouver. This study was proposed to inquire into the spiritual needs of Aboriginal Youth in British Columbia. Specifically this study inquires into the participant's regained positive self-image through their use of spiritual ceremonies and drama activities.

### **Why This Study Is Important To Me**

I have found freedom in knowing myself and in knowing where I come from. I have learned that my two greatest gifts are that I am a woman, and that I belong to the Nlha'kpmx Nation. When I learned these things they helped me to " 'de-condition' my mind and spirit"(Kesson, p.93). It seems to me that this is an example of the "awakened intelligence" that Kathleen Kesson writes about in her article "Spirituality and the Curriculum: A Hermeneutic Discussion". The notion of "accumulated, traditional knowledge" speaks to me of the negative conditioning that I have experienced in this society such as racism, prejudism, and Residential schooling, to name a few. Some habits of thought that I learned from these experiences include the notions that because I am Aboriginal I am not worthy of respect, or that because I am an Aboriginal woman that my children are not valued.

I, like Krishnamurti and Kesson, realize the "importance of freedom from conditioning and from accumulated, traditional knowledge; the significance of self-

knowledge; the reciprocal nature of teaching and the primacy of relationship; the transcendence of the 'small-self' and its limitations; and the development of a creative process of learning"(Kesson, p.93). My point is that all of the experiences that I have described above had brought me to another place within myself. Eventually, when I was ready to "let it happen" as Chief Dan George would say, my path was revealed to me. My path is a spiritual one, and like Krishnamurti I am "interested in developing a pedagogical method that might 'de-condition' the human mind and spirit" (Kesson, p.93).

This study is important to me because I have witnessed many people with eloquent thoughts and feelings who are not able to articulate what they think or what they feel. Many of these people went through the Residential School system and learned to hold their feelings and thoughts inside, not to share their thoughts and feelings with each other. In my experience with theatre I have learned that the Western theatrical process can be a healing experience. In my experience with Aboriginal spiritual ceremonies, I see qualities that are present in the Western theatrical process. Through introspection I have learned that the spiritual and creative components in Aboriginal ceremonies are integral to our development as human beings. This is an important part of human development that is too often ignored in the public education system as it was in the Residential School system.

### **Why This Study Is Important To Aboriginal Education**

This study is important to Aboriginal Education because of the past control of Aboriginal Education by the church and the government. The control of education of

Aboriginal people has resulted in a social imbalance. There is much healing that is required in the Aboriginal communities in order for the people to embrace their lives on a healthy pathway. Through the prescribed curriculum and stereotypical images Aboriginal people have learned to think of themselves as inferior people. These individuals often isolate themselves from each other. Through this process they can become lonely and resort to alcoholism and drugs and many choose suicide. This study explores the impact of participating in spiritual ceremonies and drama activities people on individual's communication skills. These activities can open the door for the participants to acquire more understanding of themselves and one other. It is my belief that people become more comfortable with each other through doing activities that help them to create community and a learning environment that is non-threatening to them.

### **Indigenous Research Methods**

In theory Indigenous People were to become civilized but subjugation, violence, and degradation formed the curricula; in theory Indigenous People were to become assimilated but in practice they became fragmented and separate; in theory Indigenous People were to become educated but the outcomes were separation(s) from self, each other, culture, community, and a sense of purpose.

The reach of imperialism into 'our heads' challenges those who belong to colonized communities to understand how this occurred, partly because we perceive a need to decolonize our minds, to recover ourselves, to claim a space in which to develop a sense of authentic humanity. (Smith, 1999, p.23)

For balance along with discipline (a Machiavellian concept) what is required is edification (spiritual, physical, & emotional). This imbalance spins like a blade, a space where Machiavellian tendencies reign. And there is no edification to balance the energies in education that are required for Indigenous people to claim their rightful position in this society as stewards of the land.

How can research ever address our needs as indigenous peoples if our questions are never taken seriously? It was as if the community's questions were never heard, simply passed over, silenced (Smith, 1999, p. 198). Having been immersed in the Western academy, which claims theory as thoroughly Western, which has constructed all the rules by which the indigenous world has been theorized, indigenous voices have been overwhelmingly silenced (Smith, 1999, p. 29).

In Western Institutions, Euro centric culture is most often the dominant form of expression ... In a Circle primarily of those steeped in "colonial consciousness," care must be taken to hear rather than to silence, to honour rather than to appropriate First Voice or the Circle method itself (Graveline, 1998, p. 235).

Everything is interconnected; we realize that what we do affects us all. Not only Indigenous People were subjugated, European peoples were also controlled to serve the imperial enterprise. Colonies were not exact replicas of the imperial centre, culturally, economically, or politically. Europeans resident in the colonies were not culturally homogeneous, so there were struggles within the colonizing community about

its own identity. Wealth and class status dominated settler interests which came to dominate the colony politics (Smith, 1999, p. 23).

### **Problem Statement**

In my experience, many people are not able to articulate their thoughts and their feelings. As a result many people do not know how to communicate effectively. Over time, these individuals have been forced to be silent about their feelings and their thoughts. Even though women, men, and children are beginning to speak about abuses that they have survived, there are still many more people who are unable to find their voices because they have not found a safe place where they could build confidence within themselves.

Many people are dying who could perhaps reach out for help if they could feel comfortable enough to communicate their thoughts and feelings. Contemporary North American culture enables human isolation:

The dominant culture in the United States of America is preoccupied with desires for materialism and pleasure. The values of individualism, competition, and independence engender greater isolation of people from each another. As a society, we struggle with many addictions: drugs, food, sex, and relationships.

(Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999, pp. 1-2)

Many people have eloquent thoughts and feelings but are unable to communicate them because communication is not a comfortable practice for them. I believe people need to

know that someone is listening and hearing their stories. (Boler, 1999; Felman & Laub, 1992; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Garoian, 1999; Oliver, 2001; Tal, 1996). I also believe we must break the insidious code of silence that squelches our voices.

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether Aboriginal people experience an improvement in their self-image as a result of participating in a volunteer theatre experience. I begin with the following question: What is the potential role of spiritual ceremonies combined with drama activities in healing? This is my main concern as I believe that to learn to use one's voice is empowering and that this can lead to better health. Healing is possible in these activities because of the trust that is built amongst the participants (Fiddler et al, 1995). This trust is integral to people's willingness to participate in spiritual ceremonies and in drama activities (Bopp et al, 1984).

In order to look at the health of the community we must first look at the reasons for the decline in health within the community. The main reason for a decline in health in the aboriginal community is genocide. "The U.S. Census Bureau has concluded that there were fewer than a quarter-million indigenous people surviving within the country's claimed boundaries, a hemispheric population estimated to have been as great as 125 million was reduced by something over 90 percent".

The people had died in their millions by being hacked apart with axes and swords, burned alive and trampled under horses, hunted as game and fed to dogs, shot, beaten, stabbed, scalped for bounty, hanged on meat hooks and thrown over the sides of ships at sea, worked to death as slave labourers, intentionally starved and frozen to death during a multitude of forced marches

and internments, and , in an unknown number of instances, deliberately infected with diseases. (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004, p. 58)

Native American people have been subjected to one of the most systematic attempts at genocide in the world's history. For over five hundred years Europeans have attempted to subjugate, exterminate, assimilate, and oppress Native American people. The effects of this subjugation and extermination have been devastating both physically and psychologically. (Duran & Duran, 1995, p.28) The early colonial forms of consciousness evolved, continuously interlocked with the rise of capitalism. At the same time that modernism came into being, colonialism was intensifying. The colonies offered room for expansion and capital, including human capital to fuel its developments“.

Ironically, while Western thought was experiencing an Enlightenment and even revolution within its own cultures, it was also practicing genocide through colonialism. (Graveline, 1998, p. 26)

The past five hundred years have been devastating to our communities; the effects of this systematic genocide are currently being felt by our people. Our communities' indigenous forms of knowledge were and continue to be relevant as we face the task of overcoming the colonial mind-set that so many of us have internalized. (Duran & Duran, 1995, p. 6)

The following is the online Wiktionary definition of genocide:

genocide (uncountable)



The systematic killing of substantial numbers of people on the basis of ethnicity, religion, political opinion, social status, or other particularity. Acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group.

What is criminal in Canada is that The War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity Act makes it an offence under Canadian law to commit genocide, whether inside or outside Canada. A person may be charged under this law if, at the time of the crime, the perpetrator was a Canadian citizen or was employed by Canada, if the victim was a Canadian citizen or a citizen of a country allied to Canada, if the perpetrator was a citizen of, or employed by, a country that Canada was engaged in armed conflict with or if, at any time after committing the crime, the perpetrator enters Canadian territory.

This Act is in effect the Enabling Legislation that applies the articles of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention of Genocide, which was passed by the UN General Assembly in 1948. However, Canada effectively blocked any such enabling legislation until the year 2000, rendering any application of the Convention to Canada ineffective. As a result, many victims of apparent genocide in Canada, such as aboriginal people and inmates of the infamous "Indian Residential Schools" where uncountable children died between 1895 and 1984, have been denied legal redress for these crimes. (Online Wikipedia)

A few of the other reasons for this decline in health are colonization, the banning of the potlatch, segregation, and residential schooling (Barman, Hebert, & McCaskill, 1986; Duran & Duran, 1995; Fournier & Crey, 1997). These processes had shut people down until they were no longer able to access their own volition.

People need to be able to debrief or share their experiences with each other so that transformation of self can be possible. When we are not able to share our experiences with each other our vitality stagnates and we lose energy for life. The code of silence in Aboriginal communities in British Columbia is an imposed value through a prescribed curriculum by church and government. This imposed code of silence is insidious in nature because of the pervasive fear experienced by many people. This code of silence has begun to be broken as people learn healthy communication skills.

## **Chapter 2: Locating the Cultural Demographic**

While doing my undergraduate studies at UBC, and over several years of attending Aboriginal spiritual ceremonies I talked to numerous people of varying ages and from different cultural backgrounds (who were also attending the ceremonies) about my interest in studying the benefits of attending spiritual ceremonies. Everyone thought it was a great idea so I was encouraged to do this study. What people from many cultures have told me is that they felt their spirits (mind-bodies) were not acknowledged in other cultures and communities while they felt acknowledged as human beings in spiritual ceremonies.

I was introduced to theatre at the beginning of my undergraduate studies. I had auditioned for and got a part in a play about a group of girls who attended residential school called "Medicine" written by LaVerne Adams. She wrote this play based on conversations with her friends and colleagues who supported her idea to write the play. I played the part of a young girl who went to Residential School for the first time and in the play I died trying to get back home. It was then that I noticed the transformative value of the theatrical process. During the rehearsal process it was emotionally difficult for me at times because of my body-mind memories of my residential school trauma. The reward was a healing that took place within my body-mind so that I felt better about myself and the world.

In my home community there have been a lot of deaths due to genocidal practices. I am the third generation in my family to attend St. George's Residential School. My Grandmother, my mother, and I attended the school from the 1930s to the 1970s. This imposed mode of schooling took its toll on my family: my grandmother died

of cirrhosis of the liver, my two brothers (both at 27 years of age) committed suicide because of sexual abuse in Residential school, and I have countless relatives who have died from situations directly related to genocide. During my undergraduate years there was a snowball of suicides, murder, and accidents related to alcohol that I stopped going to funerals because of the emotional impact on me, the cost of traveling home as a student, and the time away from classes was all too much to cope with for me. What troubled me and concerned me was the impact of genocide and stereotypical images on the Aboriginal community. The impact resulted in a loss of self-worth and a loss of self-esteem for many community members to the point of death.

### **Spirituality as a Site of Wholeness in Education**

People's journey to health is what I focus on in my work as an educator because in my undergraduate years I fell in love with theatre as a result of the change I saw in myself through my participation in a play about residential schooling. I decided to make theatre my major study and in my Directing class became aware that I needed to think about integrating counseling into my program. The reason for this is that my actors quite frequently needed me to be in the role of counselor for them. I also realized that Western theatre practices were missing an important element - the element of spiritual connection.

I began to realize that indigenous spiritual practices are performance arts too because the processes are similar. I did not think of them in this way previously because I had been conditioned to think of them merely as cultural rituals. When I examined them closely I saw that indigenous performance arts include a spiritual

element whereas Western theatre practices are not often understood to include a spiritual element. I see this as being an important part of our education because it treats us as whole people rather than only focusing on our cognitive selves. I propose spirituality as a site of wholeness in education. In my vision, I see the oral tradition and drama/theatre as a vehicle that we can use to facilitate the process of healing because the trust that is required can help people open up to their own volition or willingness to start on the path of healing.

**Statement of the Research Question:** How do spiritual ceremonies and theatre exercises impact the healing experience of Native participants?

This question is dependent on global issues faced by Native people. In my formal and informal education I have learned that our spirituality is vital to our learning process because it nourishes the deepest part of our knowledge of who we are. We need to acknowledge ourselves as spiritual beings and not only as material beings. In the short term we can learn to be happier more balanced human beings and in the long term we can contribute to the well-being of our society.

We need to become more aware of who we are as human beings. We need to become in touch with our own feelings and thoughts. We need to give nurturance to our spiritual well-being so we remain in touch with ourselves. I pray that people will return to healthy ways of living. I pray that people become willing to open up to who they are as people and accept themselves for who they are and for the gifts that they are able to share with each other. This study focuses on Aboriginal people but includes all people. We must heal our individual and collective pain in order to be whole human beings.

How can participating in spiritual ceremonies and drama exercises contribute to this healing?

### **What Deters Healing?**

Body acceptance and body awareness are important when involved with performance art. This concept seems like a given in any situation but is in reality a complex site of struggle for colonized peoples. Through colonization we learn that our bodies are invisible. The stereotype of Indigenous women is that we are easy and that we are cheap. It is important to acknowledge that these notions are out there but not to dwell in them for too long because after all they are only illusions, they are not the truth.

We have learned that our children are not valued. In his dissertation, Rod McCormick, states that "in British Columbia alone, the suicide rate for First Nations teens is seven times higher than the national average" (Bellett, 1994). (p. 2-5) Fournier and Crey write in their book Stolen From Our Embrace that "to a young aboriginal person in Canada, it's like growing up in a war zone with an enemy that attacks from within. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal peoples warned in Choosing Life, its special report on suicide, that "a significant number of aboriginal people in this country believe they have more reasons to die than to live". (p. 210) In a study on Aboriginal schooling conducted by Schissel and Wotherspoon, youth stated in their interviews and in their talking circles that "racism and discrimination impedes their learning. They all claimed that teachers in conventional schools may not intend to discriminate, but that these teachers' stereotypical views of First Nations and Métis students prejudice ability and dedication". (p. 210) "Aboriginal people are daily asked to acquiesce to Euro centric

theories of legal context that are based firmly on fictitious state-of-nature theories and cultural differences. In one way or another, they are being asked to validate the Colonists' libel. They are being asked to affirm alien values and to sacrifice Aboriginal values for them". (Youngblood Henderson, 2000, p. 248)

### **What Works**

The Medicine Wheel is an ancient symbol used to describe spiritual teachings of the Aboriginal people of North and South America. These teachings are important because we can learn about ourselves as individuals and also understand our connection to all of our relations in the universe: to our families, to our communities, to our nations, to the natural world, to the spirit world, and to the universe. Barman, Hebert, and McCaskill (1986), specified the need within the Indigenous community to move towards traditional spiritual practices, languages, and cultures to reclaim a positive identity for Indigenous people.

Almost all the Native people of North America used the ancient symbol of the Medicine Wheel. There are many ways that this concept is expressed and used to express all things both visible and invisible. The Medicine Wheel is a symbol that can be used to help us see or understand things we couldn't previously see or understand because they are ideas and not physical objects (Bopp, Bopp, Lane, & Brown 1984). The Medicine Wheel encompasses all Aboriginal spiritual ceremonies such as the sacred Inipi, Yiwipi, and smudge ceremonies, and the talking circle.

The way that we can get in touch with our identity is through the medicine wheel teachings. Performance art is a part of the sacred ceremonies. In Cranmer's (2001) exploration of voice and silence she quotes Nourbese Philip: "one makes a fully

conscious decision and deliberately acts to oust the unwelcome guest which resides in the body and the unconsciousness. The unconscious message of supremacist ideology generates an epic internal struggle of both the mind and body to come to terms with the effects of the 'discourse of my non-being'" (p. 127). It is true that Indigenous peoples have had stereotypical messages imposed on them that deeply affects their sense of themselves but this can be transformed with the tools of the medicine wheel teachings, culture, and language.

### **The Medicine Wheel**

Human beings can always acquire new gifts, but they must struggle to do so. The timid may become courageous, the weak may become bold and strong, the insensitive may learn to care for the feelings of others and the materialistic person can acquire the capacity to look within and to listen to her inner voice. The process human beings use to develop new qualities may be called "true learning".

There are four dimensions of "true learning". These four aspects of every person's nature--physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual-- are reflected in the four cardinal points of the medicine wheel. These four aspects of our being are developed through the use of our volition. It cannot be said that a person has totally learned in a whole and balanced manner unless all four dimensions of her being have been involved in the process. (Bopp et al, p.29)

### **Interconnectedness: Our Spiritual Truth**

We are taught a common understanding of interconnectedness: that all things



are dependent on each other. All things and all people, though we have our own individual gifts and special place, are dependent on and share in the growth and work of everything and everyone else. We believe that beings thrive when there is a web of interconnectedness between the individual and the community and between the community and nature.

Our community prospers when the work that each member performs is in alignment with the Earth and is a direct and sacred expression of Spirit. In Aboriginal traditional forms, the spiritual infuses a person's entire existence within the world. A spiritual connection helps not only to integrate our self as a unified entity, but also to integrate the individual into the world as a whole. Spirituality is experienced as an ongoing process, allowing the individual to move towards experiencing connection to family, community, society, and Mother Earth (Graveline, p.55).

#### Spiritual dimension of human development

The spiritual dimension of human development may be understood in terms of four related capacities.

First, the capacity to have and to respond to realities that exist in a non-material way such as dreams, visions, ideals, spiritual teachings, goals and theories.

Second, the capacity to accept those realities as a reflection (in the form of symbolic representation) of unknown or unrealized potential to do or be something more or different than we are now.

Third, the capacity to express these nonmaterial realities using symbols such as speech, art, or mathematics.

Fourth, the capacity to use this symbolic expression to guide future action ^  
action directed toward making what was only seen as a possibility into a living  
reality. (Bopp et al, p.30)

### **Healing Categories and Themes**

The following healing categories and healing themes, as outlined by Rod McCormick (1995), help us to understand the scope of how healing is viewed among First Nations people in British Columbia. These frames are constants; they are present at all times for those who choose to follow the teachings of the Medicine Wheel. They are applicable to this study because this study is based on Medicine Wheel teachings. McCormick analyzed narrative accounts for the purpose of revealing an organization for the categories. Four divisions of healing categories emerged as a result of this analysis:

1. separating from an unhealthy life,
2. obtaining social support and resources,
3. experiencing a healthy life and
4. living a healthy life.

When we step into the circle to partake in the sacred ceremonies we begin to separate ourselves from that what which may affect our health, we also connect with others in a meaningful way in the ceremonies, this experience gives us strength of spirit that nourishes our body-mind, then we become present and more able to enjoy our lives. Through McCormick's further analysis of the narratives there were five overall themes that were revealed.

1. A broad spectrum of healing resources is available to First Nations people,
2. First Nations people have a different way of seeing the world which has to be understood before effective counseling/educational services can be provided,
3. First Nations people expect that whatever is healing should help them to attain and /or maintain balance,
4. self transcendence followed by connectedness is a common route to healing for First Nations people, and
5. First Nations people are seen to act as agents of their own healing. (pp. ii-iii)

Articulating what facilitates healing for First Nations in British Columbia is important work. While there are many healing resources available to First Nations people they are not always able to access those resources due to other commitments such as family, work, transportation, time, money, and school. What is prominent about First Nations healing is that we are all viewed as sacred beings who have direct communication with the Great Mystery/Creator, and therefore, to the resources that we need.

### **Research Questions of Inquiry**

I have spoken with many people from Aboriginal communities who have eloquent thoughts and feelings but who were not able to share their thoughts and feelings because of their low self-worth. I believe these individuals deserve the right to be confident within themselves so I began to think about how this could be accomplished. It was through this process that I began to realize the benefits of spiritual ceremonies and drama activities. I saw an opportunity to combine these traditional and

contemporary activities together to see if people could regain a positive self-image through their use of these activities. How would the use of spiritual ceremonies combined with drama activities effect a group of Aboriginal individuals' awareness of their health?

## **Definitions**

I have provided the following definitions to explain my understanding of the following terms:

**Performative Inquiry:** Theatre process, drama activities, spiritual ceremonies, and cultural activities.

**Healing:** the process that we go through when we transform our lives from the inside to create a healthier environment for ourselves within the domain of the four elements: spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual.

**Transformation:** the space and energy that is changed in a positive way through the use of our volition.

**Self-concept:** the way in which we think and feel about ourselves: emotionally, spiritually, physically, and intellectually.

**Health:** a balance of the four elements (emotional, spiritual, physical, and intellectual) that provides a feeling of well being in all four quadrants so that each maintains and nurtures the other quadrants.

**Volition:** is the force that helps us make decisions and then act to carry out those decisions. Since volition is a primary force in developing all of our human potentialities, it is placed at the center of the medicine wheel (Bopp et al, 1984).

### **Chapter 3: The Importance of Spirituality in Education**

... Writing and especially writing theory are ... intimidating ideas for many indigenous students. Having been immersed in the Western academy which claims theory as thoroughly Western, which has constructed all the rules by which the indigenous world has been theorized, indigenous voices have been overwhelmingly silenced (Smith, 1999, p. 29).

#### **All My Relations: Historical Overview**

All of creation is sacred to Indigenous people. This is our message to the rest of the world. Lavina White-Lightbown, Haida Nation (Garnier, 1990, p.20)

Every part of the earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clearing and humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people.

A Duwamish Chief (Burger, 1990, p.43)

What is the reality of Aboriginal people in western society? The profound words stated above are true for Aboriginals in both traditional and contemporary societies. These Elders speak the truth as told to them by their Elders. Their wisdom spoken with respect and eloquence resonates with a depth of spirit. Aboriginal spirituality is an important healing process because it encompasses the whole person.

Aboriginals learn from their ancestors about their connection to Mother Earth. Perhaps that sounds unreal to some but they have respected the land for as long as

they can remember and as long as their ancestors can remember. The relationship  
Aboriginals have with the land is as old as time itself.

Stop for a moment to think and reflect on where we get all of our food and our  
materials to survive. We must acknowledge that we are dependent on the earth for our  
survival. We need to feel our connection with Mother Earth, as our mothers gave us life  
so does the Earth Mother give us life. Everything we have comes from the earth. The  
human family cannot live without the life cycles of Mother Earth and it is for this reason  
that human beings must respect *all* creation on earth. The following quote by, Hayden  
Burgess, a Native Hawaiian, speaks for many Indigenous people:

The earth is the foundation of Indigenous Peoples; it is the seat of spirituality, the  
fountain from which our cultures and languages flourish. The earth is our  
historian, the keeper of events, and the bones of our forefathers. Earth provides  
us with food, medicine, shelter, and clothing. It is the source of our  
independence, it is our Mother. We do not dominate her; we must harmonize with  
her. (Burger, 1990, p. 20)

The earth is the foundation and these are the principles that Natives lived by for  
thousands and thousands of years before the arrival of the Europeans.

Imagine a group of Indigenous people living in any given area and what they  
would be required to learn about the land to meet their basic needs. Suppose their basic  
needs are food, shelter, and clothing. They must learn the lifecycles of fish, deer, elk,  
trees, bushes, rivers, lakes, and berries. They must learn about where to gather their

building materials and about how to build their shelters. Indigenous peoples were totally dependent on the land and each other for their survival; therefore, they developed a close relationship with the land. They learned how to be environmentalists far before it became fashionable.

Indigenous peoples respect the land because they are grateful to the Creator/Great Mystery for giving them life and for providing them with everything they need to live healthy and useful lives. When Europeans first arrived the land was virtually undamaged. We need only to look out our windows now to witness the damage done in a short 500 years. To witness such destruction causes me to question how it happened. Our Hopi Elder, Thomas Banyacya, answers our question with the following observation:

The white man's advanced technological capacity has occurred as a lack of regard for the spiritual path and for the way of all living things. The white man's desire for material possessions and power has blinded him to the pain he has caused Mother Earth by his quest for what he calls natural resources.

(Burger, 1990, p. 78)

In his quest for wealth and power the colonizer has also devastated Indigenous people's ways of life. Indigenous people do not understand a mentality where material possessions are more important than community and land stewardship. How is it possible to sell the land, the water, or the air we breathe? This concept is not logical because these things were given to us by the Creator/Great Mystery to share with each

other.

Two issues stated above are important to Indigenous education: one issue is that the devastation in the Canadian Indigenous community is because of the Canadian-Euro-centric quest for natural resources for profit; and the second issue is that spirituality is important within Indigenous education because the land is intrinsically connected to Indigenous people's health and nourishment. These two approaches are different in that the colonizer's approach focuses on financial profit, while the Indigenous approach focuses on people's health, people's well-being, and stewardship of the land.

According to Leroy Little Bear, Tribal territory is important because the Earth is our Mother (and this is not a metaphor: it is real). The Earth cannot be separated from the actual being of Indians. The Earth is where the continuous and/or repetitive process of creation occurs. (Youngblood Henderson, 2000, p. 248) The main point being that we are dependent on the land to meet our needs and it does not make sense to murder the earth out of selfishness. Indigenous people have witnessed the government/church attempts to extinguish their lives, culture, language, and human rights; they recognize that the same process is happening to our Earth Mother. They have a direct relationship with the earth and the universe called spirituality.

Indigenous traditional ways of life have changed due to the manipulation and control by both the church and the government. Among Indigenous people there is an awareness of survival from genocide. The following statement by, Michael Alexander, an educator from the Cherokee Nation mirrors this awareness:

The attempt by Euro-Canadians to Christianize, civilize, and agrarianize First



Nations peoples has left a pathetic legacy of dehumanization. Native Families have passed on decades of pain and suffering from generation to generation. The intent of mainstream education was to erase the collective memories of all Native peoples in Canada. (Personal Communication, December 13, 2006)

Parents were forced to send their children to mission school. The government moved Natives on to reservations and took away their hunting and fishing rights. If parents did not send their children to the mission school they would either be put in jail or have their food rations taken away. Their food rations were not enough to support their children and so they became totally dependent on the government. To not have their children or their land robbed them of their purpose in life. In an effort to mask their pain, they turned to alcohol and soon they forgot how to parent their children.

The harmony that Natives experienced previously was destroyed by such insidious manipulations to civilize them. The result is generations of suffering and pain. These issues are being dealt with in the Native community through Native spirituality and holistic healing methods. In different areas traditional native healing methods vary, but all focus on the whole person:

An important constant in Indigenous culture is the recognition of four: as in the four races (color), the four directions, the four seasons, the four cardinal points of the medicine wheel, and the four elements of every person's nature (mental, spiritual, physical, emotional). It is these four elements of our being that have to be developed through the use of our volition. These aspects also must be

developed in balance. A problem in one area will affect all areas. Cultural teaching is based on this premise. In order for a person to be in harmony with the universe, he or she must be in harmony with his or herself. (Bopp et al, 36)

What has become clear to me about the question of inclusion of Indigenous spirituality in curricula is that it is necessary because it nurtures the spiritual growth of its participants. When we review the history of Indigenous education we can see that the exclusion of Indigenous spirituality from the curricula has brought much suffering and pain not only to Indigenous people but also to society as a whole. Every thing is interconnected; the affects of Indigenous people can be felt by people in other cultures and likewise what affects people from other cultural groups are felt by Indigenous people.

Our Indigenous ancestors have specifically requested that we retain our right to educate ourselves according to our own spirituality. In 1968, our respected leader Harold Cardinal wrote "new institutions must be prepared to help Indians develop their sense of identity: in the areas of social rebuilding, psychological renewal, and cultural renaissance" (Cardinal, 1969, p.167). This request is specifically tied to our responsibility as stewards of the land. Indigenous people know that the land must be preserved and we must maintain our relationship with the land and the universe because they are the sources of our spiritual connection and of our sustenance.

Based on the number of people I have met during my sixteen-year experience with spiritual ceremonies it is my belief that people do need this type of sustenance in their lives to help them grow as individuals. With this notion in mind I acknowledge the power

of the Aboriginal oral tradition, medicine wheel teachings, and spiritual ceremonies as a sacred curriculum to teach us about how to maintain a healthy balance in our lives.

### **Decolonizing Our World: Voices of Hope and Inspiration**

The following literature review includes some of the major works that lead the way on the path of Indigenous Research. Each voice honors the place of Indigenous knowledge in the world to enlighten, inform, and edify the ways of life of all people. All voices give respect to the strength and wisdom inherent in Indigenous spirituality.

### **Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples -- Linda T. Smith (1999)**

In theory, Indigenous peoples were to become assimilated but in practice they became fragmented and separate; in theory, they were to become civilized but in practice they became violated; in theory, they were to become educated but in practice they were disciplined. "Community concerns were always reframed around standard research problems. How can research ever address our needs as indigenous peoples if our questions are never taken seriously? It was as if the community's questions were never heard, simply passed over, silenced" (Smith, 1999, p. 198).

Smith (1999) directs our attention to: "imperialism, history, writing, and theory" as words that "provoke a whole array of feelings, attitudes, and values." Because "these words of emotion draw attention to the thousands of ways in which indigenous languages, knowledges, and cultures have been silenced or misrepresented, ridiculed, or condemned in academic and popular discourses" (p. 19-20).

Within the Indigenous language of critique of imperialism and colonialism's impacts are two strands: one draws upon a time when we had absolute authority over our lives; we lived in a universe of our making. The second strand demands that we learn about how we were colonized, in our own terms and for our present and future (Smith, 1999, p.24).

"For indigenous peoples fragmentation has been the consequence of imperialism" (Smith, 1999, p.28). "At some very basic level, imperialism means thinking about, settling on, controlling land that you do not possess, that is distant, that is lived on and owned by others" (Graveline, 1998, p.24). Smith (1999) urges us to reframe and name Indigenous issues so that we can determine relevant and appropriate solutions. Indigenous activists argue that such things as mental illness, alcoholism, and suicide are not about psychological and individualized failures but about colonization or lack of collective self-determination (p.153).

This thesis is not only a "mystical, misty-eyed discourse to describe our relationships with the land and the universe" (Smith, 1999, p.12) but is also a statement that Indigenous youth benefit from their participation in spiritual ceremonies combined with drama activities. Indigenous people are leaders in the Indigenous healing movement both formally and informally and that a part of this calling is to lead the way in terms of an "active beneficence of our Earth Mother (Smith, 1999, p.13) because "everything is interconnected" (Bopp et al, 1989, p. 26).

### **Circle Works: Medicine Wheel Pedagogy -- Fyre Jean Graveline (1998)**

As educators, we must examine our part in maintaining the structures of discourse and regulation which aid in the establishment of forms of social management which have moved from the direct repression and punishment of deviants to their care, discipline, and 'humane' control. (Graveline, 1998, p. 9)

Graveline explains that "the theory base of the discipline, almost all of which is generated by middle-class, urban, White, male theorists are based on notions of commonality within the human experience where little awareness of cultural diversity is present. (Graveline, 1998, p. 9)

### **Facilitation of Healing for First Nations in British Columbia -- Rod McCormick (1995)**

In his dissertation, Rod McCormick, states that the philosophical foundation of the First Nations Medicine Wheel is a strength of the traditional First Nations Worldview as it informs healing. Traditional First Nations healing incorporates the physical, social, psychological, and spiritual being. It is difficult to isolate any one aspect (pp.11-12). Therefore, balance is essential and central to our healing.

What is significant about McCormick's study is the framework he provides us with that defines what healing encompasses according to First Nations people in British Columbia. In other words, he has listened to the voices of the people because there is a

need to give First Nations people a voice in identifying what can help them in healing.

The healing categories with the highest participation rates are:

- Expressing oneself
- Establishing a connection with nature
- Obtained help/support from others
- Anchoring self in tradition
- Participation in ceremony (p.70-72)

The participation rates in these categories correlate with the results of this Aboriginal youth study that combines spiritual ceremonies with drama activities. "First Nations people have recognized the overwhelming need to be reconnected and to reclaim that which was taken, and are now acting to reconnect and strengthen those bonds" (McCormick, 1995, p.89-90).

**Joe Duquette School** -- Celia Haig-Brown & Joann Archibald (1997), Anne Makhoul (2000)

Sacred Circle Teachings are passed on through generations of legends, story telling, rituals, and ceremonies. The Sacred Circle represents the unity of all things in the universe, and it reflects the patterns of nature. The circle is the structure participants assume as they pray, dance, and confer. Everything is in the circle. (Haig-Brown et al, 1997, p. 34-35)

Joe Duquette High School, is a culturally based school for Aboriginal youth that is located in Saskatoon by the Saskatchewan River--the traditional territory of the Plains

Cree. Joe Duquette's successes and its uniqueness are based in the commitment of all involved to focus on Aboriginal spirituality within the school. The school is predominantly Plains Cree but Saulteaux and other Nations also influence the spiritual dimensions there (Haig-Brown et al, 1997, p. 33).

Joe Duquette follows the "Principles of Indian Philosophy" as outlined by the Four Worlds Development project which is based in the Sacred Circle of the Medicine Wheel. These principles can be summarized as follows:

1. Wholeness. All things are interrelated. This connectedness derives from the reality that everything is a part of a single whole which is greater than the sum of its parts.
2. Change. All of creation is engaged in a process of constant change.
3. Process. The course of change generally follows observable patterns which occur in cycles or stages.
4. All of creation may be understood in terms of two categories of existence: material reality and spiritual reality.
5. Human beings exist in connection with all other aspects of creation.
6. Human beings are in the process of becoming (i.e.: actualizing potential) from conception to eternity.
7. Human beings have the capacity to create further potentiality through the cumulative effects of learning and culture.
8. As human beings, we transcend the limitations of mere materiality by virtue of our ability to direct the process of our own becoming.
9. The spiritual dimensions of human development may be understood in terms of four related capacities: spiritual, emotional, physical, intellectual. (Bopp, Bopp, Brown, &

Lane 1984,26-30).

#### Academics

When the school opened in 1980, there were 64 students enrolled. In the 1999-2000 academic year, 235 students were in attendance. Joe Duquette offers a regular grade 9 upgrading program which focuses on literacy and math. Students can move into a similar program in grade 10 if they are still not ready to join the regular academic program. Weak student or strong, all are involved in drama, music, and dance. Many students excel in the arts activities which are at the center of our school life. Academic success is important, but it's only part of a person's development (Makhoul, 2000, p.4)

#### **Reclaiming Youth at Risk -- Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern (1990)**

North American philosophies of education and child care have been strongly influenced by the European tradition. (Brendtro et al, 1990, p. 2)

There has been a growing interest in building theories from successful practice rather than just trying to put theory into practice. There are signs of a renewed respect for the importance of practice wisdom in building a knowledge base of professional child and youth work. In the field of education, researchers are investigating characteristics of outstanding schools in order to develop models for effective practice (p.1). Brendtro et al (1990) employ the wisdom of youth work pioneers in the European tradition as well as the untapped heritage of Native American philosophies of child rearing.

At the center of these profound changes is the family under pressure. Parents are



too stressed, schools are too impersonal and the community is too disorganized to fulfill the most basic human need of children to belong. Estranged from family, friends, school or productive work, the seeds of discouragement have been sown in the four worlds of childhood.

1. DESTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIPS, as experienced by the rejected or unclaimed child, hungry for love but unable to trust, expecting to be hurt again
2. CLIMATES OF FUTILITY, as encountered by the insecure youngster, crippled by feelings of inadequacy and a fear of failure
3. LEARNED IRRESPONSIBILITY, as seen in the youth whose sense of powerlessness may be masked by indifference or defiant, rebellious behavior
4. LOSS OF PURPOSE, as portrayed by a generation of self-centered youth, desperately searching for meaning in a world of confusing values. (p. 6)

The concept of reclaiming was first articulated by Martin Wolins, a sociologist at the University of California, Berkeley, the reclaiming environment is one that creates changes that meet the needs of both the young person and the society. To reclaim is to recover and redeem, to restore value to something that has been devalued. Among the features of powerful "reclaiming" environments are these:

1. Experiencing belonging in a supportive community, rather than being lost in a depersonalized bureaucracy.
2. Meeting one's needs for mastery, rather than enduring inflexible systems designed for the convenience of adults.
3. Involving youth in determining their own future, while recognizing society's

need to control harmful behavior.

4. Expecting youth to be care givers, not just helpless recipients overly dependent on the care of adults. (p. 2-3)

Reclaiming youth also means calling for “a deep respect for the dignity of the children, education that would unleash motivation and intelligence, and the responsible involvement of youth in creating just and caring communities. Such are the foundations of the reclaiming environment (Brendtro et al, 1992: 70). Herman (1992) and Brendtro et al (1992) inspire the notion of reclaiming First Nations youth by reconnecting with others, finding a mission through public presentations and discussions, and thus resolving trauma by reviving a sense of belonging and interconnectedness (Giard, 2005, p. 62). Youth at risk have a right to the least restrictive intervention appropriate to their needs the ultimate test of the appropriateness of any placement, program, or policy is whether it serves to create the most reclaiming environment. (p. 3)

### **Restoring Sacred Vitality -- Denise Nadeau (2003)**

The program of Restoring Sacred Vitality draws on indigenous knowledge as a source of knowing and teaching. Indigenous knowledge systems are ecologically centered and affirm the interrelationship between persons, communities, and ecosystems.<sup>9</sup> In transmitting indigenous knowledge the teacher teaches indigenous theory, values, and cosmology through ceremonies, songs, rituals, and in oral traditions. (p. 9)

The concepts within Denise Nadeau's dissertation is central to this study. This was a good choice to complement the goals of this youth research project because "Restoring Sacred Vitality" is what we need to do in the Indigenous community. Also, the respect to Aboriginal traditions is highly important to Aboriginal healing.

Nadeau's (2003) dissertation is based on her Still Movement work with two groups of mostly Native women from the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre (DEWC) and a third group of mostly European-Canadian women at the Self-Expression and Dance Therapy Centre (SEAD) in Vancouver, British Columbia (p. 17). She states her commitment to social transformation and justice -- to hear the silenced voices of truth, to hear them against the destructive forces of ideology and religion.

My definition of spirituality is the experience of awakening to and living with the awareness of the divine presence and mystery within and around us--in all living beings, including Earth. When I describe theological frameworks and concepts applied in different phases of the course I use the term "spiritual reflections." (p.8-9)

The natural biological response to violence is resistance. The body is a site of both ongoing domination and resistance and one must not overlook the body-spirit's ability as an organism to respond and act in situations of danger (p.49). In other words we can do and be theology, not just think about it. In this work I show how we can recover our

experience of the sacred in the flesh, and being to embody a spiritual power that can contribute to rebuilding and transforming community. (p.8)

### **The Right to Speak -- Patsy Rodenburg (1992)**

The right to breathe, the right to be physically unashamed, to fully vocalize, to need, to choose and make contact with a word, to release a word into space --  
the right to speak.(p.3)

In the *Right to Speak*, Patsy Rodenburg speaks in depth about voice and speech work. She states that there are reasons for our habits of speech and that in order for us to reconnect with our natural voice that courage is called to action to claim our right to speak. The following topics are included in Rodenburg's in-depth analysis of our right to speak: physical interrelations; Habits Linked to Fear and Sexuality; Growth of Habits; Suffer the Little Children to Sound Like Me; Family; Women; Men; Deep Habits and Release: The Terrors of Deep Habits; Received Attitudes; Vocal Imperialism; and Professional Voice Training.

Rodenburg states that "the main things for us to keep in your mind are: how our voice works naturally; how our habits prevent our voices from working; become aware of where our habits have taken root both inside and outside of ourselves and to understand how our habits can be brought under control. (p.299)

All our acquired habits contribute to our own fear of speaking out in public or even in private. We must become aware that our habits often begin in the body. "Any useless tension, anywhere in the body, can constrict the freedom of the voice. Everything is connected to everything else; everything works with everything else".

(p.20)

"Many of us have been taught *not* to feel easy about expressing words and sounds openly. Our society likes to control the volume and keep us vocal hostages; it doesn't want to hear the thoughts and opinions of certain groups like children, women, and minorities." (p.27) Too many of us become out of touch with our natural voices as a result of oppressions and influences that undermine our positive self-images.

We first learn to shut down then begin to shut up. (p.27)

Rodenburg notes that many people "go into various forms of psychotherapy just to learn how to speak again, to find an arrested or repressed voice and make sense of themselves once more through language". (p.40) Many people have been shut down who have had to become aware of their personal blocks to speaking to be able to open their voices up again. Trauma of any sort -- like the death of a parent in early life or of a fear of being alone can silence our voices." If damage has been done to us physically that too will echo in the voice just as it sometime echoes during a nightmare when we whimper or call out ". (p.86)

The intellectual basis of most education means we don't take the learning experience deeply into our bodies, feelings and souls which, of course, is what has to happen in voice work. To free the voice means we might have to alter some of these received notions about how we learn. (p.102) One dominant group has used the English language as part of the process of colonization and separated and segregated language groups and voice cultures that fall outside their sphere of influence. (p.106) The West,

which prides itself on understanding and reason, has no understanding at all sometimes when it comes to the right to speak. (p.108)

### **Oral Tradition**

The way that Aboriginal people communicated their knowledge in traditional times was through storytelling. "In traditional Aboriginal societies art was not separated from every day life. Traditional storytelling is an art form. In Aboriginal traditions, storytelling is a critical educational tool for the cohesion of a society because it encompasses the history, values, traditions, and aspirations of each nation" (Fiddler et al, 1995, p.5-7).

Imagine whole communities who shared their knowledge from generation to generation. In these communities, the knowledge was passed to and from specific people who were meant to carry those specific bodies of knowledge forward. For example, a person might receive knowledge about certain herbs and plants but would teach one person about that body of knowledge before they passed on to the spirit world and this was how knowledge was passed on from generation to generation. After contact with Europeans many people died from diseases in mass numbers and therefore many bodies of knowledge were lost to us. It was as though our library had burnt down.

### **Voice and Silence**

Survivors of residential schools say that children were whipped, starved, had their mouths washed out with soap, or had needles or pins stuck through their tongues if

they did not speak English. In *Stolen From Our Embrace*, Ernie Crey writes about the results of his father's experience in Residential School: he says that "the teachings he might have passed on about the heart and soul of Sto:lo life were withheld, as though his tongue was frozen (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p. 24). In my own family, my parents did not teach us to speak our own Nlha'kapmxtsin for fear that we would be beaten. It was through such cruelties that we were silenced. My brothers were sexually abused at residential school and as a result were silenced to death. This insidious silence led them to take their own lives through suicide to avoid their shameful feelings. This is not only a part of our family history: it is something that we still have to face each and every day of our lives.

The impact of residential schools on students, parents and communities can only be imagined. (Barman, Hebert, & McCaskill, 1986, p.83)

My life was troubled until I decided to learn more about what my life experiences meant to me. I began to read self-help books and wrote about my life stories. Through this process I faced my pain in my stories. I learned that the stories I have to tell are important to me and important to others who are in similar situations. This journey from silence to the discovery of my voice was a difficult process for me because of the shame, grief, and self-doubt that I carried. I know that this process is difficult for most people.

I am a part of the third generation in my family who attended St. George's Residential School. I am the third female child spanning three generations who had

been separated from her mother during a critical stage of development. I noticed a transformation within myself after I wrote down my own thoughts and feelings about my emotional well-being, observations about myself and about the world, and my memories of my childhood. I wrote about my life from childhood to adulthood and how my previous experiences influenced my present thoughts and feelings especially about how I felt and thought about myself.

In effect, most often the graduates of schools such as Shingwauk and Wawanosh became marginalized beings, lacking the necessary skills of both White and Indian cultures, confused over their identity, and left to their own devices after their failed school experience. (Barman et al, 1986, p.83).

I did not have a positive self-image of myself and this is something that I still struggle with today. I did not have a spiritual sense of the world before I recognized that I was being controlled to think that I was inferior as a person just because of the color of my skin. I was ashamed to be me--a squaw, an Indian, a drunken Indian, no good for nothing ... etc.--so much so that I wanted to die. In this sense, I understand the justification that my family members went through when they took their own lives.

What has nurtured my growth to be a proud Niha'kapmx woman is my spiritual growth. Over the years I have witnessed many people from both indigenous and non-indigenous nations decide to live because they too became aware of their spirituality through their participation in Indigenous spiritual ceremonies. As an educator, it seems to be common sense that we need to pay attention to all of our elements: emotional, spiritual, physical, and intellectual. I know that the journey to healing will be a life long



process for me.

### **Teachings of the Oral Tradition**

I am grateful to have learned the power of telling stories through the oral tradition. What is the oral tradition and what does it have to offer us? Is it the same or different than drama? The oral tradition is performance art and the primary difference is the context of the spiritual component in oral tradition although some of the drama exercises (look, listen, & trust) and components of the theatrical process (rehearsing, acting, & staging) are similar (Rawlins & Rich, 1985).

The context of the Aboriginal oral tradition is relevant to Aboriginal literacy because both are based on a spiritual foundation. The goals of Aboriginal literacy are to return to our health (intellectual, emotional, physical, & spiritual), our culture, and our integrity. "Education can enhance our survival as First Nations people only if it contributes to identity development through learning our languages, our cultural traditions, and our spiritual beliefs" (Barman et al, 1986, p. 1). We believe that education of Aboriginal people is both the right and responsibility of Aboriginal people, as we are aware of our needs, and are capable of determining our own solutions. Therefore, literacy action must reflect and build on the goals and aspirations of Aboriginal communities (Saskatchewan Institute of Technologies, 1990, p. 63).

My first contact with the oral tradition was through spiritual ceremonies such as the Sacred Inipi and Yiwipi ceremonies. At these ceremonies I learn about protocols and ways of communicating with Mother Earth and Father Sky. Through these

teachings I connect with my Ancestors (Grandmas & Grandpas) and gradually I learn about my place in these spaces:

The learnings are difficult, and require much patience and the development of self-discipline. The learnings, which are emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual in nature, bear on the self, people, all living things and the environment/world in its totality. The central action area is the realm of the inner self, particularly self to self and self to others. (Couture, 1994, p. 201)

The stage is all of the places that are entered in preparation for a particular ceremony that is at once the grand finale and the start of a new performance. In these spaces the actors double as the audience because in these spaces everyone is considered to be equal.

Braine (1995) states that the “pau-wau” or powwow is an Algonquian word that was used in reference to a conjurer or medicine man, and pauwauing meant to perform a religious ceremony. However, the present day powwows and hand games are cultural celebrations that in “many cases could not be regarded as spiritual/religious activities” (Couture, 1994, p. 201). The term “*pau-wau*” was used in a new way in the 1800s--mainly by non-Indians--to describe just about any gathering of Indian people” (Braine, 1995, p.10).

Although Braine does discuss some of the spiritual relevance of the action that happens at a powwow she does not discuss the strict training that dancers must undergo in order to be accepted as a dancer. Each dancer must be free from drugs and

alcohol, they must pray and meditate as they create their regalia, they must attend spiritual ceremonies, and they must be mindful about their physical fitness and practice their dances regularly. The fact that she did not include this information is not an oversight in her writing but a part of the spiritual protocol that these teachings are passed on to dancers through the oral tradition.

### **The Voice of Peter Brook on the Holy Theatre**

In his discussion on the Holy theatre, Brook (1968, p. 42) recalls a ritual celebration that he attended to toast William Shakespeare: "for not more than a fraction of a second ... everyone present ... concentrated on the same thing ... that four hundred years ago such a man had been. For a breath of time the silence deepened, a touch of meaning was there ... an instant later it was brushed away and forgotten." He laments the fact that there is no balance between applause/noise and silence in the theatre. The audience feels uncomfortable with silence so they clap their hands and by doing so they avoid staying with and attending to their individual and collective feelings of reverence and respect for William Shakespeare. He goes on to say that:

All the forms of sacred art have certainly been destroyed by bourgeois values but this sort of observation does not help our problem. It is foolish to allow revulsion from bourgeois forms to turn into revulsion from needs that are common to all men: if the need for a true contact with a sacred invisibility through the theatre still exists, then all possible vehicles must be re-examined. (Brook, 1968, p. 44)

## **Witnessing: Beyond Recognition -- Kelly Oliver**

Recognition might become possible with the oppressor if the place and connection of subjectivity is related to the oppressed. (Oliver, 2001, p.87) focuses on response-ability and address-ability in terms of the process of witnessing. It is important for us to understand the non-relationship that the oppressed have with the oppressor. When it is clear of what is required to be in right relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor then witnessing becomes possible. The point is that re-cognition needs to come from both directions, as opposed to the oppressed addressing an oppressor who does not re-cognize their own response-ability. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's analysis of "eyewitness testimonies of the Holocaust indicate a theory of subjectivity based on witnessing" (Oliver, 2001, p. 85). I as witness to my own oppression, I am able to be both inside and outside of my own oppression and in this way I bear witness to my own subjectivity. This is my response-ability to myself, my family, my ancestors, and to the world.

### **Summary**

Our Elder and Grandfather, the late Chief Dan George, wrote these words:

The only thing that can truly help us is genuine love. You must truly love us, be patient with us and share with us. And we must love you ... with a genuine love that forgives and forgets ... a love that forgives the terrible sufferings your culture brought ours when it swept over us like a wave crashing along a beach ... with a love that forgets and lifts up its heads and sees in your eyes an answering love of

trust and acceptance. This is brotherhood ... anything less is not worthy of the name. (1978, p. 41)

First Nations people's journey to literacy has been a painful one. I feel that as each day passes that I am finding my voice on this subject that is so crucial to the growth and independence of First Nations people. I intuitively understand the situation because of my own painful experience with learning to listen to my own voice. Both literacy and spirituality are crucial in the return to health for Aboriginal peoples.

## **Chapter 4: Relationships and Patterns**

### **What We Did and How We Did It**

In the spring of 2003, Aboriginal youth gathered together for six weeks at the Native Education Centre from 5 - 8 pm. The focus of the *Learn How to Act* study is to inquire into the need for a spiritual curriculum for Aboriginal Youth. The importance of this study is that it looks at a specific way of improving the participant's self-image through their participation in both traditional ceremonies and drama activities. The research question is: Do people regain a positive self-image through their use of spiritual ceremonies & drama activities?

### **Performative Inquiry: Research Methodology**

In her dissertation, Lynn Fels, states that the research method of Performative Inquiry is situated on the "edge of chaos" that is "the place between our real world (s) and our not yet real world (s) where space-moments of learning are realized". The way to get to this place is through our courage to risk as we engage our imaginations and step away from order to stand between order and chaos. "And it is within these places that research through performance is possible. "(Fels, 1999, p.54)

Within this space-conflict of temporal imbalance the dramatic existential moment is born -- the aha! moment that is our learning, our knowing, our being becoming.

(Fels, 1999, p.55)

Performative inquiry is the method that was used to research Aboriginal youth's experiences in drama activities combined with spiritual ceremonies. The needs of this performance are that of addressing the whole person while simultaneously inquiring into their spiritual and dramatic performance (s). Do their experiences with these activities help youth to heal themselves (intellectually, emotionally, physically, or spiritually)?

The age group of 19-25 years are selected for this study. The benefit of performing an inquiry with this age group is that they are mature and able to respond in a reflective way to the interview questions. The participants were also invited to reflect and respond during the study in the spiritual ceremonies and in the drama activities.

#### Learning about Performative Inquiry

My experience of learning Performative Inquiry as a research methodology comes from the Performative inquiry class I took with Lynn Fels (DRAMA 335, 1997). The Residential School role drama described in Fels' & McGivern's (2002) chapter is from this class and involved an imaginary situation between a First Nations community and a residential school where in real time we all took on the historical roles of the people of each community. In this role play, of which I was one of the designers, participants in tribal roles were invited to take on roles of First Nations children, parents, and grandparents. The designers of the role drama played a variety of roles of the church or government including a government official, a priest, a guard, and a residential school principal. Students in role create possible new worlds through which perspectives, personal and communal actions, and cultural values may be explored both during the role drama and upon collective and individual reflection at the drama's

completion (p.18).

My Dream world as a stage: A Vision as an "Aha moment"

My vision/dream began with me sitting in a green valley surrounded by evergreen forest and brilliant sunshine directly over head. I am sitting on a block of yellow cedar shucking corn into a large brown paper bag (the kind we formerly got at grocery stores) and the bag is now close to being full. My three children (one son and two daughters) run around me as they laugh and sing, after awhile only my daughters run around me until there is only silence. They are all gone now and I look up toward the peak of the mountain and what do I see but an old dead tree still standing, immediately I notice a bird sitting in the tree and recognize it as an eagle. Then real dreamtime zooms in to me the eagle's red eyes that are suddenly directly in front of my face that simultaneously intimidate me and intrigue me. The next moment zooms out and I witness the eagle drop down out of the tree and spread its expansive wings and make a graceful arching swoop toward me. My heart is racing all the while until the bird lands belly up on top of my bag of corn husks.

The questions I asked myself were: What does this mean? How will I find out what this dream means? Specific questions: Did the eagle die? Does this mean that I am going to die? Are my children safe and why did they appear in my dream/vision?

The core meaning of the vision/dream came from a friend who understood how to interpret dreams/visions. My risk was to reach out for help and my opportunity was to understand what my dream spoke to in my everyday life. His name is long forgotten but the meaning of my vision remains, he told me that my vision represented spiritual



rebirth. I was relieved because I thought at first glance that it may be a sign of my own impending death. At the time I did not know much about spirituality but I did know that I had contemplated moving toward a healthier life style. Years later I researched the meaning of each of the elements of my vision and "aha" I learned about the richness of the contents of my vision. It took a decade to learn about why eagles fall backward the way the eagle in my dream did. "Aha" Eagles fall backward with their wings drawn in beside their bodies to trick their opponents into thinking that they are dead thereby protecting themselves. I have learned a lot about the world, the spirit world, and the universe as a result of this vision and yet there is still much to learn.

Residential School Play Government Official -- In-Role notes:

I am told to get up on the table by my Aboriginal male colleague/fellow player. He did not attend Residential School like I did but some of his family members have attended residential school. I risk letting go of myself as I know myself to take on a role of the "other". I do as he directs me to do; I stand up on top of the table. I am totally alone in the quiet of the empty room. At this point I feel totally out of my natural element. All of a sudden I have no relationships, no worries; I am lonely on my pedestal. I am on the edge of chaos. I am frightened because it's so quiet, in a way that I have never experienced before. I feel that I do not belong here. I wait and wait and wait until finally he comes back. He reports to me that they have collected all of the group's artifacts but that "they did not get all of the artifacts." Only a few had handed over their artifacts "to the authorities."

What? You didn't get them all?

No, I don't know what happened to them.

We couldn't see them; we don't know what happened to them.

I cannot believe that they did not get all the group's artifacts. "Aha" they will not bend to our subjugation tactics. I am sitting in my ivory tower not doing anything. I have no concept of what the Indians are doing out there. I do not witness what is going on because I have sent the Federal Indian Agents out to deal with the Indian problem. He reports to me again, this time he tells me that he and the others are going to bring "the Indian children from the tribes to the residential school soon." The children arrive and they are crying the Indian agents are out of breath as they explain that the parents are likely to appear soon because they were not happy about their children being taken away. Even though the children are crying I still do not understand the complexity of the situation.

#### Residential School Role Play -- Student's Out-Of-Role notes

When the role play was over we used guided imagery to assure the participants/tribe members that we would no longer hurt them. Even after we assured them of our commitment to non-violence I could see that they no longer trusted us in role or out of role. This is how poignant and real this experience was for them.

They trusted us and we betrayed them. It took some time for them to forgive the way we violated them in that imagined space. I know they will always remember that experience.

Our opportunity to learn ("aha") about how people react physically, emotionally, politically, individually and collectively, when they are forced to give up their culture, to have their spiritual objects stolen from them, was successful because of the group's

commitment to this experience taught us all what it is like to “walk in each others moccasins

## **Drama**

Drama is not stories retold in action. Drama is human beings confronted by situations which change them because of what they must face in dealing with those challenges. (Johnson et al, 1991, p. 48)

At times instruction may be given but mainly the concern is with the growth of the personality to whom facts, information, and skills may be offered as they are required. If we are concerned with maturity rather than factual knowledge in education, the main way of teaching is in the provision of situations which challenge the energies, the intelligence, and the efforts of the learners. It is as releasers of energy that drama is valuable to teachers.

(Johnson et al, 1991, p.81)

The way we approached drama within the study was through the learning objectives that the researcher-participants identified at the outset of the study. They wanted to learn about:

- Voice projection a.k.a. Longhouse voice

We looked at what voice projection means in the Longhouse. Voice projection is not yelling it is using one's voice artfully to engage many people in a large space.

- Performance movements

They were interested in acting so we talked about posture, in acting we are required to

stand by until we reach our cue and in the Aboriginal world we are required to stand for long periods of time in ceremonies.

- Memorize lines

To remember what one must say on stage requires time, commitment, and practice.

Oratory is highly prized in the Aboriginal world and where I come from people who can speak well are selected to lead the people.

- Confidence to perform

We are able to perform confidently when we surround ourselves with people who believe in us.

This is a sampling of the ways in which drama was employed in this study.

## **Role Play**

A role drama (or role play) is a drama activity where participants explore in role an imaginary world created by students in collaboration with the teacher/facilitator. An imaginary world, for example, might be a town where citizens respond to the bankruptcy of the local fish processing plant; a medieval kingdom whose peasants are planning a revolution in protest of high taxes; a conference of pigs and wolves discussing the issue of unauthorized home demolitions. Students take on the roles of individuals who live and work in the imaginary world. They speak, respond, and make choices of action from the perspective and position of their role as if they were individuals living within that situation. Tarlington and Verriour (1991) explain that "Role drama is a powerful method of teaching that aims at promoting a change of understanding or insight for the participants; It is like walking in someone's shoes to explore the thoughts and feelings of

another person by responding and behaving as that person would in a given situation” (p.9).

## **Relaxation**

The purpose of including relaxation exercises is to open up the body-mind and spirit for the creative play/work ahead. In the prayer and smudge ceremonies we learn to relax and reconnect with our spirits and with the Great Mystery/Creator of all things, in the talking circle we learn to relax our emotions by sharing our thoughts and feelings on things that are prominent for each of us, in the drama warm-ups we learn to relax; to allow ourselves to focus inward to reach a state of well being and peace; to become in touch with our own bodies; to warm-up our vocal chords and open up our chest areas; and to engage with our imaginations.

## **Specific Procedures**

The Aboriginal youth researcher-participants were between the ages of 19-25. The criteria for inclusion were that the youth had to be: between the ages of 19-25, able to commit to the group for a 6 week time period, of Indigenous ancestry, and willing to participate. The criteria for exclusion were: not of indigenous ancestry, not able to commit to the study for a 6 week time period, not between the ages of 19-25. No one of Indigenous ancestry was turned away who wanted to participate.

Yvonne Hopkins, the Native Education Centre (NEC) Youth against Violence Counselor was the person who gave agency to this study. Potential participants were approached through an advertisement posted at the Aboriginal Centre asking

participants to contact the researcher or the Youth against Violence Coordinator.

Recruitment was handled by the Youth against Violence Coordinator, she approached youth about taking the class and she also described the study in detail for potential participants. Those who chose to participate were asked to sign consent forms for their participation in the study. Participants who chose not to participate in class activities did not alter the study inquiry.

Aboriginal Youth with interests in drama and spirituality were invited to design and participate in a role-play and its associated activities. They were required to use their volition for participation in activities, the facilitator invited people to participate but people did not have to engage if they chose not to engage. People were not required to take part in all activities but all were welcome to participate if they were willing. The process did help the participants to regain a positive self-image when they were willing to engage in the activities.

### **The People in This Study**

There are five participants who participated in this study (including the researcher), three females and two males. The cultures represented in the group were from the: Nlha'kapmx, Snuneymuxw/Capilano, Cree, and Carrier Nations. Three participants are students at the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) and at the University of British Columbia (UBC). The other two participants were either looking for work or looking for a course that suited their interest. All participants had previous experience with spiritual ceremonies in their cultures with the exception of one female participant who grew up in foster homes. The youth did not have any formal acting

experience.

### **Instrumentation**

The classes were held every week at the Native Education Centre from 5-8 pm. This study combines spiritual ceremonies and drama activities to help participants to regain a positive self-image of them selves. The main focus of the interview questions was on the participant's past spiritual development experience and after their participation in the "Learn how to be an actor" class. All in-class activities included both spiritual ceremonies and drama activities.

The interview process:

The main research question was: Do people regain a positive self-image through their use of spiritual ceremonies combined with drama activities? Interviews were held both before the study was performed and after the study was performed. The interview questions asked before the study were:

1. Have you participated in spiritual ceremonies before?
2. How would you describe your changes in health as a result of having participated in spiritual ceremonies?
3. How did it feel to be included in your spiritual ceremonies?

The questions asked after the study were:

1. What have you learned about your spiritual life through your participation in this class?
2. How does this knowledge about your life affect your health?
3. How did it feel to have your spirituality recognized in the class?

## **Invitation to Ceremony**

This performative inquiry research study began with spiritual ceremonies. As opposed to a straight cognitive approach to drama activities, a spiritual approach was also included in the curriculum. The participants accepted the offering of a prayer, a smudge, and a talking circle to engage with ourselves and each other in a series of activities: a prayer of gratitude for our creator, a smudge to cleanse off negative or unwelcome energy off of the body, and a talking circle to give voice to the participant's thoughts and feelings for the purpose of resolve or transformation.

The two constant spiritual ceremonies that participants were invited to participate in were the talking circle and the smudge ceremony. The Inipi and Yiwipi ceremonies were also offered to the participants. A prayer, the smudge ceremony, and the talking circle were used to open each lesson; the prayer and the smudge were performed first to clear the air, next the participants shared in the talking circle about whatever they needed to talk about that day. Participants were invited to participate in ceremonies but were not required to participate in the activities. Participants committed to meeting for 3 hours once a week for a period of 6 weeks.

## **Lesson Design**

I allowed the participants to choose what they wanted to learn in the class and how the lessons would be structured. I asked people to help set up chairs and invited participants to decide what we should do together and how to structure our classes. At first people were hesitant to contribute their thoughts and feelings. They did not state a preference either way the first day and people accepted the way I structured the class.



At the second class people were more relaxed and were able to state their preference more readily.

The participants stated that they wanted to “learn how to act”. I suggested activities that would teach the participants about acting skills. We brainstormed together on possible activities then made choices together about how classes would be designed in terms of how each class would begin with a smudge and a talking circle so that students could talk about their thoughts and feelings with each other. This process could be seen as “a way of crossing borders” and of “introspection and reflection”.

### **Class Activities**

#### **Spiritual ceremonies**

Prayer: Each class we prayed for others and for ourselves. The focus here is on spirituality (the four r's) the acknowledgement of our life forces and the energy we created together. We expressed gratitude for the universe and all forces that sustain us that are visible and invisible.

Smudge: The intention of the smudge is to bring us more into the present with each other and to purify our energies. We use the smudge to clear away unwelcome or negative energies and to make our positive energies stronger.

Talking Circle: Together we sit in the circle and share about our day and about how we feel and think about it. The intention of the circle is to bring us to the present moment so that we can be present for each other in the class. As we share with each other we transform ourselves emotionally and this helps us to be more receptive to each other.

## Drama activities

**Introductions:** Youth participants were asked to introduce themselves in a name game by using a body gesture and to add a descriptive word to their name. For example, my name is Beverley and I added Beautiful to my name. Hence, I would say "Beautiful Beverley" in the circle and at the same time I would give my body gesture

**Relaxation exercises:** To relax our bodies we did relaxation exercises on floor mats to bring us awareness about the tensions in our bodies, to prepare us for a creative space, and to help us engage with our creative energies. Through this process we became more engaged with our imaginative capabilities.

**Movement:** We create space and claim space around us that is engaged with our imaginations. We become reconnected to our bodies and feel our energy grow as we connect with our own life force and with the energy around us.

**Shadow dancing:** In this group activity we support each other's creativity as we follow each other's movements. Together we create dance movements that are fun creative and challenging. We each create a dance pattern that our fellow participants will also be able to follow. We create movements that are easy to follow by our group members.

## **How Classes Were Conducted**

During the first class we talked about the class activities, I asked the participants if they wanted to change any of the activities. I expressed to them that we could do what I had planned or we could do something else if they preferred. Everyone agreed to proceed with what I had planned. Then I asked them if they wanted the opening activities structured in a particular way. The opening activities were: the smudge, the talking circle, and the prayer. The protocol they preferred was to first have the prayer, second came the smudge ceremony, and then thirdly came the talking circle. Every class started out with these activities.

The study class gave the participants a chance to be together, to relax, to socialize, reflect, introspect, vocalize their thoughts and feelings, and give special attention to their spiritual development and to develop their ability to understand their spiritual development and how it impacts their lives. In the sharing circle the participants developed their abilities to trust so that they could speak openly with each other about their everyday lives and significant events in their lives either past, present, or future.

## **Data Collection**

### **Interviews**

Interviews were held both before and after the study. Two youth; one female and one male, were interviewed before the study. Each semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, were 45 minutes long. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed with the written permission of interviewees.

The first interview focused on the participant's previous experience with drama

and spirituality if applicable and what their experience with drama and spirituality was at the outset of the study. The second interview focused on what the participant felt was most important about the process for them. The interviews focused on their previous experience with drama activities and spiritual ceremonies and how their experiences enable them to make sense of their lives. The questions inquired into what part (s) of the process the participants enjoyed most. They were also asked about what particular activities helped to create positive change for them.

#### Observational data

I took notes during study. I independently analyzed the data to answer the research questions and organized the findings accordingly. The themes of the findings were shared with the study participants to refine the analysis.

#### **Treatment of the Data**

The pre-study interviews are divided into healing categories using McCormick's framework that defines what "facilitates healing for First Nations in British Columbia" to structure the Youth's previous experiences with spirituality and healing. The post-study interviews look at the results of the study. The class and the interviews help to define the "Aha" Moments and the Moments of Recognition.

#### **Ethics Four R's: Responsibility, Reciprocation, Relationships, Reverence**

These are Longhouse teachings as outlined in the First Nations House of Learning's Longhouse leadership program and applied as guiding principles in this

study:

**Responsibility:** enhances well-being and we strengthen it by honoring protocols, caring for ourselves and others, and creating a safe, healthy, inclusive environment.

I (as facilitator) am responsible for taking care of the group and for how the class unfolds. I am also responsible for how the class activities unfold. All participants (including facilitator) are responsible to maintain focus, to demonstrate respect for each other, be willing to relate with each other in a spirit of togetherness, and to reciprocate speaking and listening in all group activities and ceremonies.

**Respect:** begins with self and ripples out to embrace family, community, nations, the natural world, and the Creator.

We share our thoughts and feelings in the circle, we share our energy in the activities, we share food, and we listen to each other.

**Relationships:** speak to our connection to all of creation and the Creator. We value the gifts and teachings that come to us through our relations with everyone.

We maintain a willingness to relate to each other in the class activities and ceremonies.

We acknowledge the Great Mystery and give thanks for the guidance we receive in the circle and for what we learn in other circles too.

**Reverence:** brings together respect and the sacred. We respect the spiritual realm and its place in learning.

We revere each others thoughts and feelings by listening to each other in the circle, and in all activities. We demonstrate reverence for the Great Mystery through our words and actions and acknowledge our learnings in the circle.

## **Chapter 5: Learning To Be**

### **Interviews**

The first interviews were conducted prior to the first class, and the second interviews were held after the study was completed. The first set of interview questions focus on the participant's previous participation, connection, and inclusion in spiritual ceremonies. The second set of interview questions focus on the participants experience in the class: what they had learned about their spiritual lives, how their health was changed, and if they felt spiritually validated.

All researcher-participants had previous experience with spiritual ceremonies in their cultures with the exception of one female participant who grew up in foster homes. The cultures represented in the group were from the: Nlha'kapmx/Mixed European, Snuneymuxw/Capilano, Cree, and Carrier Nations. Two participants stated their experience (s) in the interview process, the other two were not willing or able to commit to the study. When asked if they had participated in spiritual ceremonies before, three researcher-participants replied that they had participated in spiritual ceremonies within their respective cultures, the fourth participant had not had any contact with ceremony due to being raised in foster homes.

### **Healing Activities and Healing Outcomes**

Rod McCormick, a Mohawk Counseling Psychology Professor at the University of British Columbia, has developed a guide on how to facilitate healing for Aboriginal people. He gives a universal definition on how to facilitate healing for Aboriginal people that is relevant for our purposes here because there are several cultural groups

represented in this study. However, each culture and /or community has their own protocols that need to be observed. A universal approach to healing is good when there are many cultures represented in a group but a more specific approach to healing is required when working with a specific cultural group or a specific community group.

### Ways of healing

The results indicate that healing can be facilitated through the following activities, all of which are also evident in this study:

- \_ participation in ceremony
- \_ expression of emotion
- \_ learning from a role model
- \_ establishing a connection with nature
- \_ exercise
- \_ involvement in challenging activities
- \_ establishing a social connection
- \_ gaining an understanding of the problem
- \_ establishing a spiritual connection
- \_ obtaining help/support from others
- \_ self care
- \_ setting goals
- \_ anchoring self in tradition
- \_ *helping others*

In his dissertation results for the “facilitation of healing for First Nations in British Columbia,” Rod McCormick outlines categories of healing, four of which will be applied

to this study's findings. I will also *First*, These healing categories will help to organize the results for what the interviewees stated in their interviews that are relevant to the defined outcomes: empowerment, cleansing, balance, and belonging. *Second*, I will give the results of the researcher-participants' pre-study interview questions. Third, I will give the results of the researcher-participants' post-study interview questions *Fourth*, will define the "Aha" moments, Moments of Recognition, and Unexpected findings. The study results will be given in this consecutive manner.

**Empowerment:** This category refers to the individual being empowered in some way by obtaining strength and/or a sense of power through his/her own actions or the actions of others. Outcomes include: optimism, motivation, strength, self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. (McCormick, 83)

**Cleansing:** This refers to the elimination of bad energy, spirits, or emotions, and the outcomes are elimination, purging, relieving pressure, and releasing emotions. Cleansing can apply to our physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual elements. Often cleansing is the expression of emotion such as pain, anger, or fear. Belief in the healing powers of cleansing are prevalent among Indigenous people, but this belief is not prominent in Western healing and can be considered an important contribution of Indigenous culture. Much of the practice of cleansing for Indigenous people is expressed in a symbolic way and may not be clearly visible or understood by non-Indigenous people. (McCormick, 84)



**Balance:** The individual having attained balance in their lives through shifts in perspective, meaning that develops their emotional or spiritual elements, and calm or peace. The outcomes include: attaining harmony, centering, and grounding of oneself. Balance is an important concept of the Medicine Wheel; to live life in a healthy way a person must attain or maintain the four elements of the self: emotion, mental, physical, and spiritual. If a person has any of the four elements of the self fragmented or undeveloped then they will be unable to support themselves or others. This belief is not prominent in Western healing but could be considered an important contribution of Indigenous knowledge. (McCormick, 86-87)

**Belonging:** Here the person achieved a sense of belonging or connectedness to something or someone. The outcomes include belonging to: family, community, culture, traditions, and all of creation. This desired outcome illustrates the collective orientation of many Indigenous people. The extended family, friends, and members of the community are seen as a natural support system for Indigenous people and illustrate the importance of belonging. Similarly, it is seen as desirable for many Indigenous people to be connected/belong with nature and with spirituality, and ultimately, to be a part of and belong to all of creation. This belief is especially poignant because of the historical events of the past 200 years. The Federal Government's policy of assimilation has devastated the unity and sense of belonging for Indigenous people in Canada. The Government and the church were successful in their separation of Canada's Indigenous people from their culture, language, religion, families, communities, and land. Aboriginal people have recognized the importance of being connected and to reclaim rights that were forcibly taken from them. And are now acting to reconnect with their heritage and

strengthen their identity. (McCormick, 89-90)

The following quotes are from two researcher-participants who completed the pre-study and post-study interviews, one female and one male participated in the interviews, the female is of Nlha'kapmx and mixed European heritage, and the male is of Snuneymuxw and Capilano heritage:

### **Empowerment:**

Researcher-Participant (F)

Q: Okay, how did you feel about that knowledge or that awareness that you had that fear of being alone? How did that feel for you then and how does it feel now?

A: Well, at that time when I was out there I more or less just realized that ... just really when I was going through the ceremony I just more or less realized, like, why am I so afraid, like "its me, like ... I'm me, it's me, I am here, its me we're talking about you know. I guess I just felt stronger and especially during really like in life sometimes you go through stages where you're alone and just basically I know its me and I don't let my fear overcome me, myself. I still have some problems with it but I guess that way I am more stronger now, just because of going through the ceremony

Researcher-Participant (M)

Q: The first question I am going to ask you is: "I would like to know what you have learned about your abilities to learn as a result of your previous participation in spiritual ceremonies. So maybe I could ask you if you have participated in spiritual ceremonies in the past?

A: Yep. I helped my uncle with burnings, I did a whole bunch of food offerings to those who have passed on. We would make their favorite dish and burn it to them. There are pictures in the Big house about remembering them and is a really nice ceremony. It helps us and the one in the picture (who passed on) to move on in life.

Q: Oh, I see so that's good. And so how has your learning been impacted as a result of your participation in those ceremonies? Have you noticed anything about the way you have changed your perception of the world in the way that you learn?

A: Yeah, I kinda have more respect for major events and all the preparation it takes to get an event going. The pieces of wood have to be a certain size and placed a certain way, all of the wood is chopped before hand.

Q: Mhmm. Okay, great, so a lot of organizational and planning type things.

### **Cleansing:**

Researcher-Participant (F)

I guess one of the ceremonies that I partook in taught me about one of my fears. One of my deepest fears is just to be alone ... a ceremony ... when you're becoming a woman called a puberty ceremony.

Q: did that experience help you with your fear of being alone?

A: Yeah it did, it just more or less brought to my attention that, that was one of my fears.

Q: Oh, I see. So the experience helped you be more aware that you have a fear of being alone that you weren't conscious of before that?

A: Yeah.

Researcher-Participant (M)

Q: What about the burnings what sort of things did you learn from that experience?

A: Okay. I am wondering as well about your personal involvement and about the purpose of those burnings?

Q: My uncle wanted me to learn the ways and how to do it. And the burnings are to give food to the people who passed on, it could be food or clothes.

B: Okay, so you learn that it's important to honor those people who passed on.

C: Yeah.

**Balance:**

Researcher-Participant (F)

I had to go out and walk around by myself for a length of time by myself in the wilderness. I had to sit by a tree and pick a tree. I think it just brought to my attention more that I had to be alone by myself and just -- I don't like to feel alone. And like, in any kind of way in my life because I have a fear of being alone.

Researcher-Participant (M)

Q: Awesome, great so on the whole you feel good about having your spirituality recognized as a part of who you are?

C: There's two sides to it, the native side and the Catholic side.

B: Oh, I see—I see.

C: They kind of conflict though, but...I am not an extremist or anything.

B: Right, they conflict within society? Or they conflict within you?

C: Kind of both, like, whoever is in the same situation—because like, on the Catholic side they say that children are born with sin, original sin. The natives believe we are born pure and without sin right away.

B: Mhmm. Do you believe that though that children are born with original sin?

C: I am kind of on the other side there, the native side.

### **Belonging:**

Researcher-Participant (F)

Q: In what other ways did you benefit from that ceremony? From your puberty ceremony?

A: I benefited from it also because I never really knew “I didn’t know a whole lot about my culture, and like what kind of ceremonies there are and. I didn’t get to partake in very many ceremonies so in that way I was happy to have gone through something like that because its part of my culture and its what my people have done and I have never really had, like, that much access to it. Doing stuff like that or learning about it.

It gave me a sense of belonging to a culture because like when I was growing up I didn’t have any kind of sense of where I belonged and that helped me. It helped me in the sense of where I belonged but also just having, like, people from where I am from, go to it [puberty ceremony], and also people from my own culture who actually were there. You know, it was for me but also for my sister it was a really nice feeling because its hard knowing you belong somewhere but you don’t have any sense of belonging there.

Q: What were the reasons you felt you didn’t belong there?

A: I guess just because I don't know I didn't find that there were very many people who were really very friendly from there. I have always felt this sense of like, them not accepting me because I didn't grow up there. I grew up in a small town where there are mostly Caucasian people.

Q: And what were the people like in the small town you grew up in? I heard you say that there were mostly Caucasian people there and in terms of spiritual ceremonies-- were you able to partake in any spiritual ceremonies in your home town?

A: No, no, no.

Researcher-Participant (M)

B: Okay. So you have participated in many spiritual ceremonies and sometimes you were intensely involved and sometimes you were a helper.

C: Yeah, it was mostly on the island though, on my Mom's side. Other than that just helping, minor stuff. Setting up chairs and all that.

B: Oh, I see. Around the Nanaimo area is that right?

C: Yeah.

B: Great, so you have a lot of family in that area the Nanaimo area?

C: Yes.

### **Pre-study: Interviews**

The pre-study questions include the researcher-participants experience with: participation, changes in health, and inclusion in spiritual ceremonies.

#### Participation:

Both researcher-participants bridge two cultures and two distinct geographical places: they belongs to these nations and these geographical places: Snuneymuxw (Nanaimo, Vancouver Island) / Capilano-Squamish (North Vancouver, BC Mainland) and  
Nlha'kapmx (Lytton, Fraser Canyon) / Mixed European (Armstrong, Okanagan).

#### Changes in health:

The researcher participants have stated different changes in health depending on their previous experiences with ceremonies from their distinct geographical areas. The following are the changes in health they reported in the interviews according to their nations and geographical areas:

Nlha'kapmx (Lytton, Fraser Canyon) / Mixed European (Armstrong, Okanagan).

- Changes in health are cognitive and spiritual
- Being in the mountains alone with the trees
- Breathing in fresh air
- Becoming aware and understanding of our deepest fears, i.e. being alone, can help us to find solutions to help ourselves
- The action of the smudging ceremony and the smell of the smudge are comforting
- The talking circle is good because its always good to get some thoughts out and to have some of your thoughts heard by other people
- Listening to other people helps because you get to know how other people's lives are or how they are or what they are thinking and sometimes it makes me realize

that I could relate to what they are saying because sometimes I may have a similar feeling, or experience, or dream.

Snuneymuxw (Nanaimo, Vancouver Island) / Capilano-Squamish (North Vancouver, BC Mainland)

- Changes in health are cognitive and emotional.
- Afterwards I felt better - relieved.
- I always eat healthier food there, i.e. salmon etc.
- During a burning one of the plates was for my Mom...so that was kind of nice.

#### Inclusion:

- Being recognized spiritually by the people at the ceremony made me feel more whole because in a sense when people recognize your spirit -- spiritual self, it can also make you realize your spiritual self more. And it can make you realize your spiritual self more and more, than you really would have recognized in the first place.
- It felt really good because kind of like being a city indian—don't get...my cousins run the big house, know all the protocols and all that, its nice to help out. Yeah, ceremonies go on here, like, on my Dad's side but it's mostly been on my Mom's side on the island. My uncle on my Dad's side, he's very into it but...it was just conflicting schedules. He wants me to go on a canoe journey with him sometime.

#### **Post-study Interviews**

What have you learned about your spiritual life? Like, how did the activities affect you



and the smudging—the combination of the spiritual activities and the drama activities?

- I think it just made me just more in touch spiritually.
- I think the activities we did just allowed my spiritual self to, like, for people to really feel it more—like feel it.
- I have learned that not everything is by the book. Being so wrapped up in computers, talking in computer jargon and languages with friends every day, my life starts to adapt to being made up of wires, so to speak.
- In your class, gave me time to really just sit back and experience native culture again and also to realize that I am native and I shouldn't forget my past.
- Another benefit was that when life gets too stressful for me, I remember to take a deep breath and focus on what's really going on.

Do you notice any changes in your health as a result of your participation in these activities?

- Well it made me less stressed out.
- Yeah, it helped to alleviate them.
- The knowledge I have gained affects my life greatly. Although not all the time, I do occasionally remember that I am still human; I can't program or do homework every night till its morning and time to go to school again.
- Usually I put homework and projects in from of my health but sometimes I switch the two characters around when I need to recuperate. In school, we work in teams, and I have been the one going out on the edge and getting the group projects completed on my own instead of working as a team. The end result was that we did get a

higher mark when it was just me working on it, but at a cost.

How did it feel to have your spiritual self recognized in the class?

- It felt really nice because with other people it's harder to do that whereas in this class even just to realize that there is that part.... It's almost like you feel the other people's spirituality in the classroom activities
- What were some of your favorite activities in the class? One of them was where we had to act like we were crawling under something on the floor and then we also pretended that we were walking on a small little beam of wood and so you couldn't fall off. Also having to move with the dance music kind of like mirroring each other while dancing.
- So what feeling did you have while doing the dance? Happy. Or happier.
- Okay, did that happiness just last for the moment or was it a lasting thing, like, can you feel it now when you think about it? Yeah I can feel it now.
- It was quite the awakening. Combining spirituality and acting was brilliant.
- I felt better after the native ceremonies, and I really got to unwind and loosen up with the acting part of class.
- Even though I'm in class all day, then go to an acting class, it was something I looked forward to.

### **"Aha" moments**

Medicine Wheel pedagogy and Performative inquiry are complementary because they have similar approaches to human development. This is true in the sense that they both operate and evolve within the moments of recognition that propel us to the "edge of

chaos" that is the place where learning is possible. The choice is ours if we are willing to engage with a risk to accept the opportunity at each given moment. Learning happens in moments, we do not learn continuously but rather we have moments of clarity when the light gets in.

#### Spiritual ceremonies:

The main purpose of the medicine wheel is to provide us with a guide to engage with our own reflections, introspections, and visions. When we place the four aspects on our own medicine wheels we can walk around it to the place where we need to be. This is when we must use our volition to engage purposefully and honestly with whatever lesson or task is there. We will learn when we let it happen. The researcher-participants state that "we don't always notice the affects of ceremony in ourselves". As in the case of my vision, as stated above as an example of an "aha" moment, it has taken me more than fifteen years to partially comprehend the meaning of such a profound event in my life as there is yet much about that event that I do not understand.

All four aspects (spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical) of our being are interactive and synergistic. The researcher-participants have stated that "changes in health are cognitive and spiritual and changes in health are cognitive and emotional." Some one going through a puberty ceremony could become healthier cognitively and spiritually, while another person whose mother died could become healthier cognitively and emotionally.

According to the researcher-participant's, first comes awareness then comes understanding. "Becoming aware and understanding of our deepest fears, i.e. being

alone can help us to find solutions to help ourselves". Here is another testimony to awareness before understanding: "The knowledge I have gained affects my life greatly. Although not all the time, I do occasionally remember that I am still human; I can't program or do homework every night till its morning and time to go to school again. Usually I put homework and projects in from of my health but sometimes I switch the two characters around when I need to recuperate". We already have the solutions for our challenges within us.

Drama activities:

I believe that fun learning situations take hold in our awareness much quicker than dry situations. Smiles and laughter makes life sweet and much more engaging that creates a climate of learning that is deep and lasting. Its fun for me too as the facilitator to pretend and/or imagine:

What were some of your favorite activities in the class?

One of them was where we had to act like we were crawling under something on the floor and then we also pretended that we were walking on a small little beam of wood and so you couldn't fall off. Also having to move with the dance music, kind of like mirroring each other while dancing.

So what feeling did you have while doing the dance?

Happy or happier.

Okay, did that happiness just last for the moment or was it a lasting thing, like, can you feel it now when you think about it?

Yeah, I can feel it now.

Listen, I hear another voice...

It was quite the awakening. Combining spirituality and acting was brilliant.

I felt better after the native ceremonies, and I really got to unwind and loosen up with the acting part of class.

Even though I'm in class all day, then go to an acting class, it was something I looked forward to.

What the youth chose to express in their role-play

In the study class, researcher-participants were given this idea to investigate: How did the gold rush affect Aboriginal people? The participants turned this idea into the following question: How did the Aboriginal people relate to the Europeans? The participants wanted to educate other Aboriginal youth and chose the following concept for the purpose of creating a role-play: What do we need to know about Aboriginal

people? The male student who participated until the end of the 5th class created the character of a "Wise Chief" whom youth looked to for guidance. The scenario the male youth participant created was of the Chief addressing Aboriginal youth about what we need to know about Aboriginal people. The actual script has not yet been written.

### **Moments of Recognition**

- In the classroom the youth decided that they wanted to continue with creative exercises as opposed to creating a role play. This is a significant moment of learning because the youth wanted to stay within the boundaries of the safe space they co-created that gave them peace and calm and that helped them to dispel the stresses in their lives.
- In the interviews the youth stated that they had learned about themselves and had engaged with themselves and each other in a more meaningful, deep, and lasting way. The words they used to talk about the impact of the study on their lives were: real, remain human, happy, happier, unwind, loosen up, brilliant, better, relieved, healthier.

### **Unanticipated Results (findings)**

For youth and people in general it is not enough to know that person belongs to a certain culture or geographical place but what is important is that they (youth or people) participate in ceremonies with the people of their community. People's participation in ceremony with community members is vital to their sense of belonging. The following quote is from a researcher-participant who felt like an "outsider" until she experienced a

spiritual ceremony with the members of the community from her traditional homelands:

I guess just because I don't know I didn't find that there were very many people who were really very friendly from there. I have always felt this sense of like, them not accepting me because I didn't grow up there.

I grew up in a small town where there are mostly Caucasian people.

Were you able to partake in any spiritual ceremonies in your home town?

No, no, no.

This researcher-participant had experienced a sense of belonging in her tribal traditional homeland because she had partaken in a spiritual ceremony with her tribal community members but did not experience a sense of belonging in her home town. Specific learning depends on knowledge of one's background and awareness of one's individual path through life. In order for youth to learn about who they are they must be aware or become aware of where they come from: historically, geographically, and collectively.

What is not said in this quote is that there are no spiritual ceremonies for her to partake in within her home town. There are those in the mainstream society who still believe that Aboriginal spirituality is heathenistic or beneath them. There is little awareness of the true nature of Aboriginal people due to lack of education.

## **My Notes as Researcher-participant Leader**

I enjoyed being with the youth and observing their enjoyment in the class as the weeks progressed. I observed their passivity in the first class but saw that change by the second class when they made clear choices about how they wanted the class to develop. I witnessed their sincerity in their commitment to learning, their deep regard for each other that developed into trust for each other. Their willingness to help each other in the activities and to help me to set-up the class-room and to pack-up afterward was a demonstration of their commitment to the process. It was an honor to facilitate the establishment of trust for each other and to establish a working relationship with each other in a spirit of creativity and togetherness.

## **My Participation in the Study**

These exercises are always beneficial for me because they strengthen and relax me. After every session I felt stronger. I felt more confident as a person and more able to reach out to the world. I felt cared for and taken care of by the group members because their energy was non-threatening. I enjoyed the music, the dancing, the sharing of our stories, and all of us pushing through our fear to risk as we created voice and movement together. Our time together was spent in reverence of each other and for being in this class together. We respected each other without the need to attach judgment on each other. The positive energy we brought to our circle was also reciprocated among group members.



## **Summary of What Was Found**

What has become clear to me about the question of inclusion of Aboriginal spirituality in curricula is that it is necessary because it nurtures the spiritual growth of its participants. When we review the history of Aboriginal education we can see that the exclusion of Aboriginal spirituality from the curricula has brought much suffering and pain not only to Aboriginal people but also to society as a whole. Our Indigenous ancestors have specifically requested that we retain our right to educate ourselves according to our own spirituality. This request is specifically tied to our responsibility as stewards of the land. We know that the land must be preserved and we must maintain our relationship with the land and the universe.

We would be dishonest if we said white people brought us nothing but bad.

Some brought precious gifts. Nor is all change negative. We have moved on, and we cannot return to some false conception of a long-gone paradise. Nor do we want to. We are fortunate that we still possess within our First Nations links to a profound spiritual and cultural healing, from which other communities can learn.

(Fournier & Crey, 1997, p. 22)

## **Chapter 6: Significance of Spirituality**

### **Conclusions**

The conclusions to be drawn based on the findings are that spiritual ceremonies combined with drama activities does help youth to heal themselves because they are validated through listening to each other, they can be creative together, they can reconnect with themselves, each other, and the universe.

Alternative explanations for the findings: If public education could include Aboriginal spirituality with Aboriginal people writing their own curricula we would have a healthier and stronger society.

The impact of the study in terms of what was learned has informed people about the truths of the historical and present day reality of Aboriginal people's lives and schooling in British Columbia.

The strengths of the study are that it directly helped those of us who participated in the study, gave hope to those who encouraged it around the sacred circle, and honored those who have passed on to the spirit world as a result of genocidal tactics. The limitation of the study is that few youth could participate due to being a single parent, working a job, and/or full-time school work.

## **Implications**

The implications for professional practice are that changes must be made to increase awareness of teachers, to teacher training, and to curricula. Implications for decision making are that curricula must be written for the purposes of educating Canadians and Aboriginal people of Canada about Aboriginal people. Another implication for decision making is that of locating resources for Aboriginal people to develop their own curricula.

Implications for a scholarly understanding of the field are that much work is yet to be done to understand what needs to be done and how we are to proceed.

Implications for theory building are that we are beginning to develop a canon of Aboriginal literature in all areas.

Implications for future research studies are that there is still much to be done.

## **Recommendations**

Recommendations for further research are that work is required in all areas. Research methodologies must suit the proposed project .

Recommendations for changes in academic concepts, knowledge, or professional practice requires dialogue with each Aboriginal community in British Columbia.

Recommendations or modifications in accepted theoretical constructs also requires

examination and exploration.

Recommendations concerning changes in organization, procedures, practices, behavior all need to be examined thoroughly by Aboriginal people to discern necessary changes.

Recommendations for pedagogical changes are that more attention, time, and resources must be given to developing ways of establishing a positive working relationship with Aboriginal people and to increase understanding of Aboriginal teaching methods and to understanding of the ways Aboriginal people view their world(s).

### Summary

There is much work to be done in all areas of theory, practice, and curriculum development. Aboriginal people from the communities must be at the fore of decision making when it comes to their own education. Aboriginal spirituality must become a part of the norm in Aboriginal education and not the exception. The combination of spiritual ceremonies with drama activities does help youth to regain a positive self-image of themselves and on that basis is worthy of further research and consideration.

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## Appendix 1: Class Plan

The following question was given to the participants to inquire as to what they wanted to learn: What do we want to learn? The participants stated that they wanted to learn how to be an actor. Together the participants brainstormed the following learning objectives:

### **Learn how to act:** Group learning objectives

- Voice projection a.k.a. Longhouse voice
- Performance movements
- Memorize lines
- Confidence to perform

We took these learning objectives and applied them to our in-class activities.

**Drama activities:** voice and body movement, shadow dancing, recital of monologues, trust activities, listening to each other, and sharing in talking circle.

**Spiritual ceremonies:** Prayer, talking circle, smudge. (Each group of First Nations people or First Nations cultures have their own protocols for the spiritual ceremonies so care should be given to locate the appropriate protocols before proceeding.)

**Role Play:** drama activities to establish trust for role play, and create role play.

### **Chronological table of events**

During each week the activities were repeated at ever deepening levels. A new activity was added each week.

#### **Week 1**

Smudge

Prayer

Talking Circle: Discuss project & project expectations (both participants & teacher)/ and current events.

Introductions

Name Game: i.e. Beautiful Beverley or say Yowzie, Yowzie, Yowza and move on to next person.

Warm-ups & trust exercises (voice and body movement)

Breathing and Relaxation Exercise

Voice Warm-up

Chairs: Tuesday night at the cinema. What kind of movie are you watching? Or traveling somewhere in a car.

Set up interview times

Pizza

## **Week 2**

Smudge

Prayer

Talking Circle

Relaxation exercises

Shadow Chorus dancing

Drama warm-ups

Closing Circle

**Week 3**

Smudge

Prayer

Talking Circle

Breathing--opening up the body, exercises, relaxation

Stretching--open up the body/voice

Motorcycle exercise

Shadow Chorus dancing

**Week 4**

Smudge

Prayer

Talking Circle

Relaxation exercises

Shadow Chorus dancing

Drama warm-ups

Closing Circle

**Week 5**

Smudge

Prayer

Talking Circle

Song

Breathing

Stretching

Shadow Chorus dancing

Role Play

Closing Circle

***Week 6***

Smudge

Prayer

Talking Circle

Relaxation exercises

Shadow Chorus dancing

Drama warm-ups

Closing Circle

## **Appendix 2: Restoring Sacred Vitality**

Still Movement Class with Denise Nadeau and Alannah Young which provided a foundation for my own study class, "Learn How to Act".

Break your heart no longer,  
each time you judge yourself  
-- you break your own heart

(Nadeau, 2003, p. )

The following are notes on the different aspects of my experience in the Still Movement Class with Nadeau and Young. We met for 12 weeks in a community space on Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. This experience was profound for me because of the ways that it helped to restore my connection with my identity as an Aboriginal woman and to make me aware of the ways in which I was violent within my inner being particularly to do with judgments about my self. I learned that I have a right to my own body space; I have a right to be here in this world; I have the right to feel my own feelings and be responsible for my feelings; I have a right to be non-judgmental with myself. This experience helped me to

### **Part A. Self & Group Dynamics**

My behavior in the smaller process group changed in a positive way as I learned about the ways in which I break my own heart whenever I judge myself I break my own

heart. The learning objective of the group is to become increasingly non-judgmental and non-violent with self and with others. The methods we use to get in touch with our feelings are ritual and ceremony, body-mind integration, resource development, life-art process, and group movement.

When I started this Group I was in the habit of continually judging myself and gradually throughout the process I became aware of how violent I was with myself. As my awareness of my self-judgment increased throughout the group process I was able to become more relaxed about myself. I felt more confident about my place within the group ~I felt that I belonged to the group. I became increasingly comfortable about sharing my opinions about my experiences in our group activities.

I was closed when we started our group but became increasingly open to other group members as we shared more of ourselves and our personal/private experiences with each other. I felt more comfortable in the end with my body than at the start of the group. I became more acquainted with my bodies, memories. I realized that specific parts of my body house certain memories, certain parts of my body communicate different things to me.

I enjoyed the process of writing poetry and other kinds of writing and then allowing my body and myself to create movement that mirrored my writing. We also created pictures and through our bodies mirrored the movement in our pictures. I became increasingly aware of the ways in which I was violent with myself and the ways in which I judged myself.

## Part B. Group Development

Shadow dancing was a whole group activity where we created shadow movements to music as we mirrored whoever was leading the group at that given moment. The leader depended on which way the group moved and the leader was always the person in the front of the group. This process was gratifying because the simplest movements became a work of art when the group was unified. The process helped to unify the group even further our connection became deeper and our trust toward each other grew too. It was an amazingly eloquent and beautiful experience.



## **Appendix 3: Drama activities**

### **DRAMA Warm-ups**

The following warm-up is useful for the beginning of the school year. The progression of the warm-up's is to ease students into using their bodies, voices and minds imaginatively. Most of the activities are geared towards the students getting familiar with and focused on the drama context, as well as focused on one another.

#### **1. The mini check-in:**

The class is seated in a circle. Each student is to state a word that expresses how they are feeling in that particular moment. It is important that each student has their say, uninterrupted, in a check-in. The class rises and walks around the room (spaghetti walk -- no direct path), introducing themselves to each other by shaking hands, whilst saying their check-in word. Each student should adopt the word of the person they greet and express the feeling of the new word. For example, if I greet someone who says the word, "angry" to me, I would immediately stomp away, expressing anger until I adopt a new word upon greeting someone else.

#### **2. The color visualization:**

Students find a place on the floor, and lie down on their backs, with legs extended, arms by their sides, and palms facing upwards. Teacher says the following, in a peaceful and slow manner (lots of pauses): " Breathe in to 4,

and out to 4. Focus on your breathing and begin to see the air passing through your body with each breath. Slow down the breath -- in to 6 and out to 8. Clear your mind, relax your shoulders, jaw, head, trunk.. ..Every part of you is being internally massaged by the flow of breath that is going deeper and deeper into your body. Inhale until the air reaches your toes and exhale, pushing from your toes. As-you push the air out of your mouth, see the cloud of air, the cloud is grey, inhale grey, see the grey moving through your body and let it change to pink then push it out into a pink cloud that surrounds you. Now inhale pink and let it slowly turn into fuchsia -- a bright pink, let the color reach your toes until you push it out to envelop you ... (red, purple, blue, black, grey, white). Now, you are surrounded by, and protected by your own white cloud of breath."

### **3. Mini vocal warm-up**

The class is still on the floor. Students should place their hands on their stomachs and try to push their hands when they inhale, then focus on dropping their jaws, and lowering their tongues as they exhale. They inhale, and exhale, with mouths closed to "hmmm." until they feel a buzz on their lips. Repeat. Then inhale and exhale, starting with "hmm" then opening their mouths to "aww". Repeat. Teacher tells students to punch out the words she says to the ceiling: "Hey, hey, you, you -- get off of my cloud," (The Rolling Stones). One word at a time until students know all of the words, then they repeatedly shout the words to the ceiling, with feeling.

#### **4. Imaginary basketball**

Students line up facing each other. Their partners are facing them. Teacher informs them that one line possesses the ball -- the basketball. Music (funky) is played and the students are told to play an imaginary game of basketball. The teacher may change the ball, or ask the students to change the size of the ball every time they catch it, for more variety.

#### **5. Commercial --a game**

Class sits on chairs in a circle, while the teacher stands in the middle. No chair is set out for the teacher as there must be one chair less than the amount of people. The teacher points to each student and gives them a title: "basketball, baseball, and hockey." Each student must have a category. The person in the middle must shout out either of the categories, or the word, "commercial". The people under the category called, must jump up and find a new seat (not the one next to them). The person in the middle must try to find a vacant seat after calling out the category. When "commercial" is called, everyone must rise and scramble to find new seats. There is always someone left in the middle, like musical chairs.

A great activity to energize students, and to physically warm them up.

#### **6. Final check-in**

Class sits in a circle again. This time they each state a word that expresses how they feel now.

**Note:** There should be a noticeable difference between the students' first check-ins, and their final ones.

These warm-up activities do not have to accompany one another. Each activity can be used independently from the other ones. It all depends on what your classroom objectives are, for that particular day.

### **Breathing & Relaxing: Warm-ups**

Lift shoulders (shrug shoulders) & let drop, keep feet apart & pointing forward with hands at your sides, push shoulders down, stand tall as if a tube is going down the middle of your body, take a deep cleansing breath in through the mouth and nose then let air out through your mouth. Repeat but this time put your hands on your stomach & as you breathe in, your stomach (not your chest) should expand - by doing this you are using your entire diaphragm to breathe. This breathing is good for role drama because it helps you to project your voice with less effort.

Tilt your head forward & let your chin touch your chest, tilt your head to the left & then to the right, then rotate your head twice around then go twice in the opposite direction.

Bring both shoulders up & let them drop. Rotate your right shoulder by making circles with your elbow. Now do it in the opposite direction. Do the same with your left elbow.

Bend over & touch the floor & as you come up pretend that your discs are like

building blocks that are stacking one by one as you stand up straight. Repeat but blow out before you bend over take a deep breathe while touching your toes then straighten up & hold for the count of 5, then breathe out for 5. Repeat. CAVEAT: Only repeat once or you might faint.

**Astronaut/Space: Walking Warmers:** Listening and acting.

Find a space by yourself or walk in a circle.

Tell students to walk about as if they are:

- 1) Exhausted
- 2) Energetic
- 3) Heavy
- 4) Light/weightless
- 5) Walking on ice
- 6) Walking on hot rocks
- 7) Very old very cold
- 8) Have heavy feet

**Meteorite Space Throw:** Brainstorming & Upper Body Warm-up

- Stand in a large circle.
- Start with 1 ball (make a ball by using scrap paper) then move to 2-3 balls & throw the ball from 1 person to the other. When you throw the ball, call out a "Space" word i.e. planet, stars, space shuttle, UFO, Mars, etc. I use scrap paper instead of balls when

space is limited since paper balls don't roll as much. Use balls when in the gym or outside

- Other variations: Use a foam ball or rubber ball for more bounce. Roll or bounce the ball in the middle & catch the ball. Any theme can be adapted to this activity.

### **Hokey Pokey Warm-ups**

Stretches : (a) reaching up to the sky with one arm and then the other. The object is to stretch one's body as far as possible and then let it 'flop' down, rag doll-like; (b) reach up with both arms and then go onto tiptoe. Again, stretch the body as far as possible and then let arms 'flop'.

This exercise is a very simple way to open up the rib cage and basically raise awareness of one's body and the amount of tension we hold in our arms and hands without actually being aware of it

Hokey Pokey: The main objective here is to warm up the body and voice in a fun way whilst encouraging the group to work together. Some students may be initially hesitant to participate, but once they are cragged into the centre a couple of times they get into it.

Note: some days you can go through loads of body parts, other days only a few. I think the most important element about this activity is its ability to establish 'community' in the classroom. Many students will have fond memories of singing the song in elementary school while it gives the ESL students a chance to learn a bit of

'Canadian' childhood. Also, they all love to laugh at the teacher making a goof of her/himself!

This exercise is a good one to do early in the morning or on low energy, rainy days. I make a point of saying "Louder" or "As soft as you can" with the group part to encourage the students to listen.

The Elephant Walk: (a) Form a tight circle, everyone facing in one direction, and put your hands on the waist of the person in front of you. On a signal from the teacher, everyone sits on the lap of the person behind them. The goal is to get everybody sitting down with anyone falling on the floor; (b) Once the class has mastered the sitting, try the walking. Count 1-2-3-right foot, 1-2-3-left foot.

This exercise is a blast and is an excellent way to get all the students into a good mood. Suspense and excitement is built into the activity by giving the instructions quietly. When they get really good at it, get everyone to count together.

### **Motorcycle Warm-up Exercise:**

Motorcycles Purpose:

To warm-up the vocal chords and lips the participants will make the sounds of their own motorcycles.

Their bodies are warmed up with the movements they make as though they are traveling on their motorcycles.

Their focus is to create the sounds and movements as though they are traveling on their motorcycles.

The imaginary activities the exercise requires of the participants is to

create their own parking garage, to imagine that they are going to go for a ride on their motorcycle, to imagine the sound of their own motorcycle motor, to imagine a country road, to imagine a left turn on a highway, and to imagine returning to their own parking garage.

Motorcycles activity:

- Begin this exercise with all of the participants in a circle formation.
- Ask them if they would like to go on a trip.
- Tell participants to start their motors, the facilitator may demonstrate this action by placing both arms out in front as though gripping bike handles and rev the motor with one hand (depends on if you are right or left handed). Also, the legs must bob up and down to create image of motor on and of the seat of the bike.
- Guide participants on to the country road, help them visualize the country side. The facilitator may do this by giving such cues as "you are enjoying the sunshine, feel the wind on your face, you are enjoying the country side as you drive along." Be as creative as you like.
- Guide the participants on to the freeway (whether you turn left or right on to the freeway is up to you the facilitator) and speed them up because after all we must obey the speed limits or we may get a ticket. Remind participants, especially elementary school students to be careful not to bump into each other.



- And then when you feel that the participants are ready you may guide them back to their own parking garage in the circle.

## **STRUCTURES Warm-Ups**

Name game (Ice breaker) - In a circle, each student says a word that describes themselves. The word must begin with the same letter as their name (e.g. bashful Betty). If unable to come up with a response say Yowzie, Yowzie, Yowza and move onto next person.

### Physical Warm-up

Jog on the spot slowly then quickly

Jog on the spot slowly, then jog with knees up high

Neck: turn head side to side half neck circles

Shoulders: bring arm straight in front of body with other arm, gently put pressure on elbow toward body to stretch repeat with other arm put arm behind head gently put pressure down on elbow to stretch repeat with other arm.

Side (Lats.) with left hand on hip and right hand over head, bend torso to the left repeat on other side.

Legs: standing on slightly bent left leg, lift right leg and pull into body from (standing) knee to stretch, hold bring leg to the side, hold bring leg to the back keeping knee

pointed down and holding ankle repeat with other leg, hold (sitting) with feet together, pull up with the knees and push down with the elbows relax then gently push down with elbows only repeat.

Back and while lying down, bring legs up and bend at knees.

Shoulders keeping shoulders on the ground, drop knees to one side, then the other on all fours, sit back on bottom while keeping arm out in front, drop head back to original position (on all fours), then transfer weight forward, while dropping hips (back is arched and arms are supporting weight)

Breathing: inhale through nose, exhale through mouth take deep breaths, focus on using diaphragm. The above activities are used to warm up and prepare the body for physical activities. The jogging is intended to get the blood flowing and the stretching that follows helps to reduce the chance of injury. All stretching exercises should be done gently so that injury to the muscles is less likely to occur. The breathing exercise is an important component in the warm up as it helps one relax the body and mind as well as focus on the activities to follow.

#### Walk through construction site

Put on imaginary hard hats. Explain that class will be taken through a construction site.

While moving, have class imagine walking through a construction site. This could be done either in follow-the-leader fashion or in scattered formation. The following are examples of ways the class could move through obstacles: walk around lumber walk or jump over paint or tools crawl or crouch under beams balance on planks travel

through wet cement

(Young children, children could brainstorm for items in and around a construction site before the activity begins. Discussion of prepositions is also possible.)

### Mirroring activity

After taking the class through obstacles, have children imagine they are entering a room with mirrors. Pair students up: One partner act as the mirror. This student will mirror the movements of the other student. Start with facial expressions, then head movements and finally whole body movements. Stress slow controlled movements to begin. Voices or sounds could also be incorporated.

### Echoing activity (voice warm-up)

Students imagine that they enter an empty building and taken up high. Have class make two lines. Students will echo words or phrases, alternating from each line. The echo will begin in a strong, loud voice and end in a soft, quiet voice. This activity could also be done with each group echoing together rather than individually.

### Visualization activity

With eyes closed, class imagines they are looking out the window. Ask them what they see and make suggestions. Each student chooses one object in the landscape and pretends that they are that object. Ask them to imagine how they look and what kind of sound that object makes, if any. Have each student create landscape by moving to a spot in the room. To allow students to observe others: number class into two groups.

While one group performs, the other group observes. This warm up-activity activates the focus and imagination of the students. It is also intended to tie into the Structures theme.

*Drama activities and warm-ups contributions are credited to the following people from*

*Lane 335 summer class of 1997:* Jodi Derkson, Leslie A. Chang, Vandy Britton,

Beverley A. Machel, Trevor Wright, and Mimi Ng.

## **Appendix 4: Research ethics certificate of approval**